THE WIFE AND THE MISTRESS.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

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THE

WIFE AND THE MISTRESS.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY MARY CHARLTON,

AUTHOR OF THE PIRATE OF NAPLES, ROSELLA, ANDRONICA, &c. &c.

" ——Celebrare domestica facta."

HORACE.

" We find fit subjects for our verse at home."

ROSCOMMON.

VOL. III.

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THE WIFE

AND

THE MISTRESS.

CHAP. I.

ON re-entering her present abode, Laura was assailed by the lamentation of Lady Mary, who affected to be extremely chagrined at the unannounced evasion of her friend.

"Independent of the pleasure I should have taken in accompanying my dear Laura," said the fair complainant, "I wished very much to present you to my cousin, Mrs. Bergarde: for those Embletons have been making such impertinent

 insinuations,

insinuations, that I am impatient to put you *en train* to contradict them."

"Am I then important enough to be the object of their displeasure?" asked Laura, who now recollected that she had observed, on the preceding day, some very hostile regards directed towards her from the sisters.

"They are very angry with us both," replied Lady Mary, "and pretend to think themselves very ill treated that we did not stay and be killed on Saturday evening, to accommodate them! and now they are cajoling poor old Meedon to be very indignant that the old coach is half demolished, though my father is having it mended up as fast as possible, and has sent another for our use, *en attendant*. But old Meedon knows better than to quarrel with her bread and butter!—and then they are like two *enragées*, because I said you were thought the handsomest girl in the house, whilst they endeavour to console themselves with insisting that in the world you would not be in the least regarded."

"Indeed

"Indeed I dare affirm they are right," interrupted Laura. "I am certain, however, that they may safely avow this opinion, for it is not probable that I shall afford them a chance of being convicted of an error."

Lady Mary condemned this spiritless assertion with considerable warmth, and then recurred to her original reproach, of having walked out without imparting her intention to her; which was very cruel, she said, because the neglect had subjected her to the stupid raillery of the Embleton party, who asserted that her tender attachment to this surprising beauty was very ill requited.

To silence this importunate complaint, Laura thought herself compelled to assent to the request that immediately followed, of accompanying Lady Mary the next morning to the house of Mrs. Bergarde, who was, she asserted, the best natured creature in the world; and she was certain her amiable friend would like her excessively, for Mrs. Bergarde lived in a very retired manner, and scarcely ever

received more than a very small party of select intimates, except indeed once or twice in the season.

Yet the promise had scarcely passed the lips of Laura ere she repented that she had been induced, by any motive whatever, to make it. But again she considered that the excessive condescension of Lady Mary required some sacrifice of inclination and opinion on her part; and the malignancy of the Embletons in endeavouring, by wounding the vanity of her self-entitled friend, to give her such a disgust as would induce her to unite in the party Laura trembled to think was forming against her, obliged her to suppress every symptom of reluctance to this intended introduction, the idea of which appeared particularly gratifying to Lady Mary.

Not a single line had she yet received of commiseration, friendship, or remembrance from Adwan, though Mrs. Aubrey and Caroline had both promised at her departure, to write instantly on obtaining from her an intimation of her residence.

This seeming neglect alarmed her: every time the postman announced himself by the well-known signal at the street-door, her heart fluttered with hope and expectation; but the emotion was succeeded by the keenest disappointment. Could Mrs. Aubrey, so generous and compassionate—could Caroline St Orme, so amiable and considerate—could they so soon forget her, and the interest she had apparently inspired them with? Had she incurred their disapprobation by her carelessness of the communication Mr. Aubrey had thought it necessary to make to her, or had St. Orme so unfavourably reported the misrepresentation of the people at the inn, which the attendance and artifice of Biranly had occasioned, that they thought themselves justified in withdrawing that esteem and favour, she had considered to be so fortunate and happy an acquisition for herself?

A suspicion so distressing very much harassed her spirits, and the various inquietudes she experienced, rendered her a very unfit associate for the group amidst

whom she now found herself, so little to her own satisfaction or comfort, neither of which were increased by the partial and embarrassing attentions that had superseded the entire neglect she had originally experienced.

The breach between the Embletons and Lady Mary became every hour more serious and irreconcileable. They refused to apologize to her for being the cause of the perilous situation in which she had been placed, because it proceeded from her own want of consideration, they asserted, in detaining the carriage near an hour at the house of Mrs. Bergarde—a circumstance the servants had been compelled to divulge in their own justification; and Lady Mary, in return, took every opportunity that offered of asserting that her new favourite, who was excessively obnoxious to the sisters, as a rival in attractions, was unquestionably the most beautiful and fascinating creature that had appeared for some time; and though Lady Augusta Veranon had objected to her residence amongst them, because she was the

the daughter of a woman without character, it must be very evident to every one that she possessed much more *retenue* than any girl of fashion, or than most right honourable ladies of seven or eight-and-twenty, though born of a Countess, who died before her Lord could procure a divorce.

This double attack upon Lady Augusta, which happened likewise to be founded in truth in both instances, was instantly reported to her by the adverse party, and she became a very zealous supporter of the Embletons; whilst others, who had been eclipsed or offended by the sisters, or shocked by the haughty demeanour of Lady Augusta, ranged themselves under the standard of Lady Mary Mornay, and declared their entire assent to her proclamation of the superior graces of their new companion, Miss Delaunie.

Laura meantime, unconscious of being even the ostensible cause of this terrible fraction in the peace of the fair society, received the eager advances of the Mornay interest with secret regret, and shrunk

dismayed from the pointed sarcasms of the Embletonians. Fanny Meedon, who admired her, and well knew how to commiserate her situation, hoped that the hostile spirit she had discovered would evaporate, or at least take another direction; but her mother, tormented by the complaints and insinuations of Lady Augusta and her phalanx, and assailed at the same time by their artful *cajoleries*, appeared very much inclined to rescind the assent she had been induced to give, when the proposition of Lord Bellingham in favour of his daughter, had been made.

In the evening Laura learned from Mrs. Maunder, who had called at the house of Lord John, to oblige her young Lady and to oblige herself, that he was dangerously ill at Harwich, where he had meant to embark for Hamburgh in pursuit of the Marquis, whose route he had accidentally discovered; and that Mr. Aubrey had sent an express to London for the physician who always attended him.

This intelligence afflicted her severely, for,

for, spite of the austerity of this old Nobleman, she experienced for him both veneration and tenderness; nor could she avoid reflecting, disinterested as was her nature, that his death would deprive her of a friend which she could never more want than at the present moment, she believed. Indeed she experienced such an increase of anxiety at this event, that she endeavoured to excuse herself from fulfilling her engagement with Lady Mary, who would not however, listen to her explanations and entreaties, but pleaded the poignancy of her own disappointment if she were silly enough to allow them.

Laura submitted, but with a heavy heart; and her new friend, much more gratified with having gained her point, than concerned at the reluctant sadness she betrayed, conducted her to the residence of Mrs. Bergarde, who happened, at the moment of their arrival, to embellish it with her own presence, and received her young guests like a woman of the world, who can render herself, when the occasion invites her, a very pleasing and

fascinating companion. Her age was apparently past thirty, her figure fine, her countenance full of vivacity, and her voice grateful to the ear. Laura was involuntarily pleased with her; and such is the elasticity of youthful spirits, that she forgot for the moment half her inquietudes, and her countenance responded to the returning tranquillity that was stealing over her mind.

Mrs. Bergarde was replete with anecdote and information, and her sallies were delivered with a grace that would not suffer the hearer to scrutinize too narrowly into the source from whence was derived the peculiar *agrémens* she had the art of diffusing over each little narrative. Lady Mary appeared to better advantage in the society of her cousin, because this lady would not suffer the domestic grievances or party differences of Mrs. Meedon's household to enter into discussion, and blunted all asperity by the gay and easy *nonchalance* that accompanied her own censure.

Laura at length recollected that time flies

flies with a swifter pace when the mind is amused; but Mrs. Bergarde interrupted the intimation she was giving Lady Mary of this truth, by enquiring with a smiling air, if she had not a very lively imagination.

"I am almost assured of it," added she; "and I hope you will encourage me to think well of my judgment, by permitting me to persuade you that I am now leaving this ticket at the door of your good Mrs. Meedon for her fair inmate, Miss Delaunie; and this necessary ceremony past, I think myself entitled to ask that you will take your dinner with me to day."

Laura was not permitted by her very dear friend to decline this mark of approbation, for such it really was, from Mrs. Bergarde, who would not suffer either of her young guests to return to —— Street, to improve their toilet.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, "we are past the tasteful age in which yellow and rose-coloured satin *negligées* must be indispensably exchanged for full-

trimmed evening suits! My gentle *soubrette* shall arrange your fair locks, and present the ewer and napkin--with youth and beauty, *on peut se moquer de la parure!* ——Ha, my good Lord Glendarvon!" added Mrs. Bergarde, addressing the father of Lady Mary, who was at this moment announced, "youth and beauty are talismanic words, and what those words portray compose the enchantment:—I could not pronounce them without conjuring up the spirit of Glendarvon—behold him here!"

He smiled.

"I have long suspected you of practising strange witching arts," returned he; "and you now confirm my surmise."

Lord Glendarvon then addressed Laura and his daughter; and understanding from Mrs. Bergarde that they passed the day with her, he invited himself to join her dinner party; to which the lady assented, upon condition that he would vanish for the remainder of the morning—a condition, however grievous to his Lordship, he was yet obliged to comply with.

In

In fact, Mrs. Bergarde had informed her fair associates that if they wished to drive to the park, her carriage was already in waiting; and as Lady Mary had readily accepted the proposition, she did not chuse to improve her own renown so far as to be seen *en famille* with Lord Glendarvon, and a very handsome face, which she presumed was yet wholly unknown, even though his daughter were present; for she was well aware of the reputation of her noble cousin, and was equally convinced that a delightful little scandalous anecdote will spread very rapidly, but is the most difficult thing in the world to be collected again into a focus, and returned to oblivion.

Most unwillingly then Lord Glendarvon withdrew; but he had received a little intimation from Lady Mary that rather consoled him, and the first person Mrs. Bergarde beheld on turning into the park, was his Lordship *à cheval*, who complained of a chillness in the air, and talked of an approaching shower.

Mrs. Bergarde declared herself of his opinion:

opinion: she did not, indeed, invite him to enter the carriage, but she advised Lady Mary and her young friend not to quit it, which they construed into an intimation that she did not wish them to do so.

Lord Glendarvon thus disappointed, could only converse with the female party at intervals, and at length he left them. This prediction of rain, though uttered *au hazard*, happened to be just; for as Mrs. Bergarde directed her servants to quit the park, it began to fall with violence, and a gentleman galloping up, desired the men to stop, and open the carriage door.

"It is that silly Sandby!" exclaimed Lady Mary: "he will insist upon being let in; and I dare say he is as wet as possible."

"Would you believe," cried he, half out of breath, "that Madalina has just passed, and refused to take me home, under an idea that my damp coat would give her cold? Do I see Miss Delaunie? Laura, is it you?"

Laura

Laura bowed, and the colour mounted into her cheek at the recollections that assailed her.

Mr. Sandby had now seated himself, and Mrs. Bergarde, with an air of assumed gravity, said—"My servants wait your further orders, Sir."

"Let me out at the corner of Albemarle Street," returned he, with much composure. Then turning to Lady Mary, who shrunk from his wet garments with a very expressive mien, "You have not seen your old friend Madalina since she has been in town this season." He resumed—"Miss Delaunie, the old trotting Countess, my mamma-in-law, was saying the other day she wondered what the devil had become of you! Are you in town?"

Laura replied that she was; and he was proceeding with some further question or comment, when Mrs. Bergarde interrupted his unfeeling loquacity.

"Pray, will you allow me to enquire," she demanded, "when Lady Madalina refused you admittance to her carriage, did

did she recommend to you to make an essay on the forbearance and compassion of others, or was this obliging secondary thought entirely your own?"

"Madalina recommend to me!" repeated he. "No, faith!—if I had been washed into the serpentine river, I believe her widowed sighs would never have reached the ears of her greatest intimates.—Laura, where shall I tell Lady Melville that you are to be found?"

Laura, who had not the art of parrying such blunt attacks with success, was compelled to give him the information he required, though she did it with evident reluctance, and feared his knowledge of her residence would subject her to the unpleasant effects of his thoughtless folly.

When he had quitted them, Lady Mary laughingly enquired how it happened that Sandby had at length found resolution to cast off the chains of Mrs. Bergarde. "When last I saw him," added she, "he was sighing for my good cousin's cruelty, against which he has been exclaiming these three years—from the time, I mean, when

when you refused to take a journey to Gretna Green with the pretty *enfant!*

"Who can withstand the eloquence of the Dowager Lady Melville?" returned Mrs. Bergarde: "poor little Madalina was to have a husband procured for her, you know; and a good mother *fait toujours l'impossible* to settle her daughters!"

Mrs. Bergarde might have discussed upon the dexterity of Lady Melville in accomplishing this important object at a moment so critical; but the presence of Laura restrained any further comment upon the subject.

On her return home, she had scarcely reached her drawing-room, when Lord Glendarvon rejoined her, and the party was not increased at dinner by another guest—a circumstance that pleased Laura, and produced a very contrary effect upon her young friend, who thought she had never before found the house of her cousin so very *triste;* whilst her father, on the contrary, had never, until this moment, discovered that it contained so much attraction, though the chains of the lively widow

widow Bergarde had been worn by half the loungers, shufflers, and striders about town.

In the evening he still maintained his post, notwithstanding Mrs. Bergarde enquired, with an air of surprise, if his Lordship were in general so little engaged: and Lady Mary was then rather relieved by the appearance of a few birds of passage, who called in *en passant*. Of these a lady, who seemed to pride herself upon collecting an attentive audience to the information she detailed to them, concluded a series of pleasant light facts with saying—"But all this is mere *bagatelle*: have you learned the tragical history of poor Lord John Traherne?"

Laura started, and regarded the speaker with a countenance of earnest apprehension.

"His Lordship is travelling," said Mrs. Bergarde hastily. "Pray is the new Opera repeated to-night?"

"His Lordship's travels are terminated very suddenly," resumed her visitor.

"It is fit they terminate in some way," observed

observed a young man, who had been addressed as Mr Nevarc, " for Lord John is the most obsolete personage I ever encountered. He has persuaded himself that the Marquis is still a minor; and I hear that he is accompanied by an army of constables to apprehend the seductress of his nephew, and bring her to condign punishment."

" They left England much before the time that was generally mentioned," interrupted the anecdote-monger; " and I understand they are both at this moment at a certain southern Court, where Lady Harriet has been received as the Marchioness.

" And how was our ambassador amused whilst this circumstance took place?" demanded Mrs. Bergarde, wishing to confute a tale so improbable.

" Oh, he was at his *campagna* with the fascinating Signora——very well occupied in arranging the fine pictures and *jolis meubles* he had borrowed from the house of embassy to accommodate the taste of his fair friend."

" The

"The next information that appears necessary to be granted," said Mrs. Bergarde, "relates to the amusements of his English Lady, Mrs. W———, *en attendant.*"

"My dear Madam, her letters inform her absent associates——have you seen any of her letters?—they abound in the sweetest sentiments—such delicacy, such uncommon refinement and grace!—her letters inform us that she is making a tour to the Glaciers with Lord Amble, and two more companions of exquisite sensibility for the beauties and sublimities of Nature."

Mrs. Bergarde, wishing to divert her talkative guest from recurring to the apprehended catastrophe of poor Lord John, affected great inclination to see these charming letters; and was informed that they would no doubt very shortly be published for the benefit of unfortunates, who had not the same opportunity of cultivating an elegant and refined taste.

Laura could no longer resist her earnest wish of learning if her most dreaded surmises

mises concerning Lord John were unhappily well founded; and in the faint hope that they might not be so, whispered an entreaty to Lady Mary to enquire if possible into the circumstance that had been announced to them: but this trouble was spared her new friend by the pertinacity of the lady News-carrier, who informed the circle that Lord Bellingham's uncle had taken the frolic of the Marchioness, and the consolation her husband had procured himself. so seriously, that he had swallowed a very large quantity of laudanum at Harwich, and absolved himself of the oath he had unwarily taken, to bring some of the truants to reason—if he lived.

The light manner in which this was mentioned, still however induced Laura to cling to the hope that it was the mere uncredited production of idleness and scandal; nor would Mr. Aubrey, she reflected, have sent for the physician of his Lordship if an event so fatal had taken place, which must have excluded all idea of aid or recovery. Yet she felt anxious and

and dejected; and Lord Glendarvon, who remarked the effect the preceding conversation had upon her mind, took occasion to assure her that the reports of the lady who had thus obtruded her intelligence on the party, were generally as void of truth as of decorum: whilst the good lady, on her side, having discerned the direction in which his Lordship's eyes were perpetually turning, no sooner observed the whisper in which her own eulogium was uttered, than she had her carriage called, and drove a considerable round, to proclaim that Lord Glendarvon allowed Lady Mary to associate with some young girl whom nobody knew, but who was evidently his mistress; and that Mrs. Bergarde had been induced——Heaven only knows how! for his Lordship was only eloquent in one way: the product of the mines of Potosi or the Bank of England always explained his meaning! In short, Mrs. Bergarde countenanced the new mistress—absolutely patronized her—a very handsome girl, whose pretended

tended name she did not trouble herself to learn.

Mrs. Bergarde had observed the glances of the anecdote-hunter, and suspected that the motive of her sudden retreat was to disseminate, without loss of time, the hints she might have gathered—hints, which the excessive and very evident admiration of Lord Glendarvon, and the silent and retiring figure of Laura, might very easily engender in the prolific brain of Mrs. Sandyman.

She was chagrined that the circumstance she had wished to guard against, would thus most probably obtain a foundation; yet she experienced a something of approbation and united compassion for Laura, that prevented her from much regretting the introduction Lady Mary had been very anxious to procure for her new friend. She was likewise piqued to observe that any guest of her's should be generally neglected by her more accustomed associates, who universally supposing her to be a newly hired companion of Lady Mary or her cousin, overlooked her

her of course; and the fair widow resolved to force her into notice, that she might have an opportunity of replying to the enquiries that would ensue, that she was the portioned daughter of the Marquis of Bellingham, by a foreign lady of great distinction.

The latter part of this abridged history Mrs. Bergarde knew to be false; but that Miss Delaunie was possessed of a handsome independence Mrs. Meedon herself had reported, from the authority of Lord Bellingham; and as that was the case, she was sufficiently *au fait* of the way of the world, to believe that they would obligingly do their utmost to credit the honorary part of the story.

In this view, Mrs. Bergarde motioning to the young man to approach her, who had commented so freely upon the conduct of Lord John, he prevailed upon himself to obey the summons.

"Lady Mary sings admirably, you know," said she, addressing him, "and her charming friend, Miss Delaunie, possesses the genuine Italian *gusto:* conduct them

them to the next room, where you will find music and instruments, and exert yourself against the card-table interest.

Mr. Nevarc, whose critique upon poor Lord John appeared to have entirely exhausted his elocution, on receiving this hint, opened a pair of fine dark eyes, and regarding Laura for a moment in silence, hastily walked up to her, and pointing to the door, made her comprehend, with the aid of a few words half pronounced, that he wished her to pass into the next room. But Laura, not in the least understanding the reason that could induce him to give this intimation, hesitated in some distress, from which Lady Mary laughingly relieved her, by taking her hand, and drawing her to the exact spot Mr. Nevarc wished her to attain, which was the seat of a forte-piano. The young man, with a countenance of unalterable gravity, then placed before her the accompaniment of a fine *aria Italiana,* and hastily presenting the vocal part to Lady Mary, took a violin, and began according it with infinite dexterity. But Laura had now resigned her seat, with an

entreaty to be excused; and Mr. Nevarc, immediately taking it, motioned to the fair songstress to proceed, and accompanied her with all the delicacy and skill of a professor.

Laura almost involuntarily expressed the approbation she felt, with a judgment that again attracted towards her the attention of Mr. Nevarc, who once more offered her a seat at the instrument, which again she declined.

He then flew to a harp, that was in a corner of the room, and presented it to her; and Laura, distressed at so persevering an homage, which was seconded by the entreaties of Lady Mary and those of her father, found herself compelled to satisfy the expectations they appeared to have formed.

The indefatigable Mr. Nevarc had placed music before her; and Mrs Bergarde, as well as Lord Glendarvon, having enforced attention by their example, Laura entitled herself to the applause that followed her performance.

"How delightful!" exclaimed Lady

Mary. "Those Embletons," added she, "have been learning the harp these ten years, and now finding their stupid efforts entirely unsuccessful, they have given it up for the lute, which they pretend to prefer."

Mrs. Bergarde, who had vaunted her Italian *gusto* upon a venture, was herself surprised at the truth of her assertion; and she now found the opportunity she had sought, of answering the "Who is she?" in her own way; adding, that Miss Delaunie was the favoured friend of Lady Mary Mornay, and resided at the house of Mrs. Meedon.

The spirit of harmony was soon, however, extinguished in every one but Mr. Nevarc, who still lingering near the instruments when they had been abandoned by the musical nymphs, and finding by the *tournure* the conversation had taken, that no second flash of soul was to be hoped for, soon vanished.

When Lord Glendarvon was the only remaining guest of Mrs. Bergarde, save his daughter and her *charming friend*, he

enquired of Laura her opinion of the eccentric Horace Nevarc.

"He is certainly a favourite of Apollo," replied Laura.

"In more instances than one," observed Lady Mary, "for he is a poet."

"And a painter," rejoined Mrs. Bergarde: "a very good linguist, a tolerable Opera-dancer, and a decent ballet-master!"

Laura was almost incredulous of such various accomplishments; but Lady Mary asserted it would be very easy to convince her of most of these acquirements, by obtaining admittance to the private Theatre of his mother, the *Marchioness* of Rodenwach, which was the easiest thing in the world.

The name of this celebrated German *Marchioness* of English origin, as well as her history, was not unknown to Laura; and she now accounted very readily for the strange and heterogeneous qualifications of the favourite son.

The incantation mentioned to Lord Glendarvon in the morning, appeared to have

have had a most powerful effect upon him; for he could not prevail upon himself to leave the house until it was deserted by Lady Mary and her fair companion, who finding herself rather embarrassed by his too fixed attention, was much delighted when she was relieved from it.

"Is not Mrs. Bergarde a charming woman?" demanded Lady Mary, as they were riding home *tête-à-tête*."

"She appears, indeed, to be very amiable," replied Laura, "and is certainly very pleasing."

Lady Mary was piqued at the mediocrity of her commendation.

"I perceive," exclaimed she, "that Mrs. Bergarde is not a favourite with you; for those who do like her, are quite fascinated with her."

Laura, fearing to appear ungrateful for the unexpected honour that had been conferred upon a being so insignificant as herself, was now obliged to exert all her eloquence to efface this idea of her petulant companion; and with some difficulty

succeeded in exculpating herself from a charge so little creditable to her refinement of taste.

CHAP. II.

HER reflections, now again undiverted by external objects that enforced attention, recurred with greater energy to every subject of anxious import, from which her mind had for the last day been partially exempted.

In the morning Dolly was again dispatched to the house of Lord John, with an enquiry her fears and inquietude dictated; and on her re-appearance, Laura heard that the physician, who had been compelled to return to town immediately, had informed the housekeeper that her Lord was indeed very ill; but he did not despair of his entire recovery, if he would be

be induced not to think further of his voyage and journey for the present.—"But they say," added Dolly, "that the old Lord is obstinate, and will go, if he drops down dead by the way."

"As he still lived however, Laura could still hope.—"Ah! he may yet recover," sighed she; "and the deserted children of Lady Bellingham, as well as myself, may yet retain a friend."

At this moment the postman announced himself at the street-door, and with a palpitating heart she desired Mrs. Maunder to hasten down stairs, and ask if he brought any letter for her. But again she was destined to disappointment; and the cruel neglect of her Adwan friends weighed heavily on her heart. In this situation of mind, the importunate affectation of friendship displayed by Lady Mary, was doubly irksome to her; and every step that approached her door, gave her an unpleasant sensation of fear that it might portend an invasion of the solitude she courted—a solitude very unexpectedly interrupted shortly after by intelligence

that the Dowager Lady Melville desired to be admitted to her.

Laura was both surprised and alarmed at a visit so little to be accounted for; and ere she could recover in any degree from the confusion she experienced, one of the servants of the house tapped at the door, and Dolly, who answered the summons, curtsied, and threw it open for Lady Melville, who had required to be conducted to the apartment of Miss Delaunie.

As Dolly withdrew, the lady threw herself into a chair, sighed deeply, and covering her face with one hand, extended the other to the distressed Laura, who received it in silence. At length Lady Melville spoke.

"Can I think it kind, Laura," said she, "to have learned your arrival in town by an accidental circumstance only? Why, my dear child," continued her Ladyship, softening her voice to the pathetic, "why was I to be avoided by Laura Delaunie, to whom the unhappy cause of my sorrows has been a mother, and in whose

whose partiality I ever fondly shared? Was it because I am wretched, and because I peculiarly at this moment want the soothing cares of friendship and affection? No; I am convinced you would not have thus wounded my feelings, had you not been tutored to do so."

Laura instantly declared that this idea was a mistaken one, and mentioned her incertitude whether Lady Melville would have been inclined to receive any attentions from herself.

"You should not for an instant have doubted it," returned the Countess. "Have I indeed ever afforded you reason to form a supposition so injurious to the attachment I have, from your infancy, testified for you?"

At this interrogation Laura could not fail to recollect the manner of her departure from Adwan; but she had not courage to advance this argument, which could also have been easily refuted by pleading the powerful effect of that anguish and distraction which might well

be supposed, at such a juncture, to swallow up every other sensation.

Extremely embarrassed, therefore, she knew not how to parry the reproaches with which she was gently overwhelmed; and Lady Melville, taking advantage of her perplexity and confusion, offered to forget her past neglect, in the promise and hope of future attentions.

In a hapless moment Laura assented to this compromise, and Lady Melville pursuing the point at which she aimed, demanded an instant proof of her alacrity to perform her part of the stipulation, by accompanying her home, and passing the day with her.—"I should otherwise be alone," added she; "and my reflections, Laura, are not cheering."—Then wiping a ready tear from her eye—"You tell me," she resumed, "that you have only seen the Hamiltons and Mrs. Bergarde since your residence here; you cannot therefore plead engagements, and I must of course expect your ready compliance."

With an insurmountable reluctance, and a secret and indefinite sense of impropriety,

priety, Laura attended her. Nor could all the pathetic ejaculations or artful blandishments of Lady Melville reconcile her to the renewal of this unpropitious connection, or induce her to sooth her inquietude with the belief that she really was, as this artful woman repeatedly protested, healing or relieving the cruel griefs of which she complained.

Laura had forborne to name the Marchioness, that she might not indiscreetly wound the feelings of her mother: but Lady Melville herself having begun the subject her shrinking guest found herself unable to converse upon, took occasion to mention to her how much the whole family of Lady Bellingham had been mortified by the conduct of the Marquis, who declined alike to take her back, or procure a divorce, which might render the situation of both more desirable.—"But your father, Laura," added she, with more warmth than she generally allowed herself to display, "is wholly guided by that infamous woman with whom he has fled; and as it is her interest that he should

not marry again, my unfortunate Emily is the sacrifice!"

This lamentation was followed by a shower of tears, in which Laura never felt less inclination to join; on the contrary, she not only experienced a secret disgust and indignation that Lady Melville should so ill adapt her complaints to the hearer she had chosen, but thought that the mother of the Marchioness was the last being in the world who should condemn the conduct of Lord Bellingham, whose parental neglect came next into discussion.

"Traherne and his sister Emily," said the Countess, "must indeed be properly attended to; but you, Laura—you whom he ought to love from so many causes!—my dear child, my heart bleeds for you!—he has shamefully disregarded your interest, and it is no longer in his power to atone for his neglect: the people who were appointed your guardians, have died insolvent, or at least the property entrusted to them for your provision, cannot be ascertained."

Laura

Laura now comprehended the reason of the evasive answer she had received from Mr. Hamilton, and the want of solicitude both his Lady and himself had displayed to alleviate her inquietude upon the subject of fortune; and the intelligence of Lady Melville, thus corroborated, was terrible to her. The Marquis flown, it was scarcely known whither; Mrs. Rothemere dead; Lord John Traherne absent, and, if still living, not in a situation to attend to her distresses; and Mrs. Aubrey negligent of her welfare—all pressed upon her recollection, and gave her a sensation of anxious misery, such as she had never before experienced.

"Laura, my amiable girl, be not thus afflicted," continued Lady Melville; "I will be your friend! I was most unwilling to disclose this circumstance to you, but your interest and future happiness extort it from me. Understanding as you now do, your situation, your prudence and good sense will point out to you that no unimportant scruples should intervene

intervene to deprive you of any tolerable establishment that may offer. Indeed, I am so much concerned for the predicament in which I behold you, that I will endeavour to forget my own griefs, to promote your welfare."

Laura sighed as she acknowledged this profession of kindness, and declared her invincible repugnance to accept any establishment upon the principle thus described.—"But it is not probable," she added, "that I should find myself compelled to act in contradiction to the counsel of your Ladyship, since who would cast a favourable thought upon a being so poor and obscure as myself?"

"You may be mistaken, my dear child," said Lady Melville. "I trust you are; and I shall renew my advice when occasion calls it forth."

Laura was well pleased that a subject so repugnant to her delicacy should be dropped; and after a day of agitation, affecting remembrances of the past, and fearful forebodings of the future, she hastened her return to ——— Street about

about nine o'clock, excusing herself from remaining any longer with Lady Melville by pleading a severe headach.

On reaching her own abode, Laura learned that Mrs. Hamilton had twice sent to her in the morning, and had been very desirous that a billet should immediately follow her, wherever she might be; but Dolly having, with the permission of her young Lady, taken the opportunity of passing a few hours with a friend, and Mrs. Meedon being likewise from home, no other person could give information where she then was.

Fanny Meedon, who related this circumstance, added, that she had ventured to enquire of Lady Mary Mornay, who declared that she was as little in the secret of Miss Delaunie's engagements as an entire stranger.—"At length, when my mother returned home," continued this amiable young woman, "and I learned that you were with Lady Melville, I took the liberty of sending to your friend Mrs. Hamilton, to inform her of it; but

I fear

I fear my intelligence was too late, as you did not receive the billet in question."

Laura was extremely chagrined that this kind solicitude had been unsuccessful; and being equally anxious to learn the occasion that had urged the repeated messages of Mrs. Hamilton, a porter was immediately procured, and she wrote a hasty note, to say that she would call at her door early on the following morning; but if the communication Mrs. Hamilton had wished to make, were such that it ought not to be delayed, Laura entreated that she would send her an intimation of it, and she would at every event procure a carriage, and attend her in half an hour.

After a considerable interval, in which her imagination tormented her with the delineation of a thousand fancied accidents, the messenger returned, bringing back her own billet, accompanied by a scrawl upon a dirty bit of paper, from which Laura with great difficulty deciphered these words:—

MISS DELONE,

" Ma'am, my master and Missus is gone to luk after Captain Rothmear, who is lik to di. They stade as long as they cud, bot cud not sta any longer; they cud not finde wer you be this mornin; the lade sed she node nothin on you, and they was oblige for to go.—I am your humble servin,

" MARY LOWDIN."

" Gone to Adwan!" exclaimed Laura, " and I most unfortunately——"

" Are they gone to Adwan, Madam?" cried Dolly. " Lack-a-day!—what for? Some prank of the Captain's, my life for't!"

" To Adwan," repeated Laura, " and I have not been enabled to renew myself in the remembrance of Mrs. Aubrey and Caroline by one line!"

" Well, Ma'am," resumed Dolly; " then

" then I suppose I am to send away the porter: you don't want him no more."

Laura assented, and the *suivante* retreated to execute this office, and rejoin the Loo-party below; for Mrs. Maunder was now initiated into the fashionable science of card-playing, and bade fair to rival the most accomplished *soubrette* in the house, in her attachment to it, notwithstanding her impatience, now and then, at the frequency of her losses.

Fanny Meedon, really anxious to learn the success of the measure resorted to by Laura, to ascertain the motive of Mrs. Hamilton's solicitude to send to her, now stole again to her apartment; and in reply to her enquiry, Laura put the note of Mary Lowdin into her hand.

" The Lady knew nothing of you!" repeated Miss Meedon. " What lady does the woman mean? It cannot be Lady Melville; nor can she allude to my mother, who was at home, she informs me, the second time the servant called, and gave the intelligence required, which I like-

I likewise sent to Mrs. Hamilton by James.

—My dear Miss Delaunie," resumed she, after some further discussion upon this subject, "may I take the liberty of advising you, if you have any intention of remaining in the ill-assorted society of this house, to constrain yourself so far as to humour the professions of Lady Mary Mornay, and appear to repay them with the consideration she requires; for I fear if she joins the Embletons, who cannot endure your superior merit, you will find this residence entirely insupportable: and Lady Mary is almost offended at your disregard, which she thinks unaccountable, because her vanity will not allow her to perceive how little her ideas and her pursuits can accord with your's."

"I thank you," replied Laura, taking her hand, "for your advice and your good opinion: I will follow the one, and endeavour to deserve the other. Believe me, Miss Meedon, I should be very solicitous to remain under your roof, were I allowed the privilege of cultivating your friendship: for such an advantage I would endure

endure the unprovoked malice I could not avoid, and from your example learn calmly to despise the impertinence I might feel myself superior to."

"Perhaps," said poor Fanny, "you think me too tame and spiritless; but if you could guess all I have endured from the time I saw my sixteenth year, which is now five summers since, you would not wonder at my present composure under a treatment which to you may appear insufferable. I am one of those unfortunate beings who seem only born to illustrate how far the caprice, folly, and injustice of the rich and the great may be carried. I may venture to say injustice, because I have been from early childhood so fully impressed with the humility and dependance of my situation, that the errors by which I may perhaps offend, are involuntary, and unmixed with presumption."

"How is it possible," exclaimed Laura, with an emotion as sudden as it was indignant, "that Mrs. Meedon can suffer ——But forgive me; I am not entitled to

to ask your confidence, until I can have the good fortune to convince you that I am not unworthy of it."

"Of that I am already convinced," replied she: "to be young and beautiful without vanity, and to have had a daily example of the impertinence of affected condescensions, or the unbounded insolence of unchecked pride, without suffering your own conduct to be influenced by them, this alone, without further observation, would assure me that your mind is naturally strong, reflective, and amiable. Yet, my dear Miss Delaunie, if you will still allow me, when I think a hint may be of service to you, if you will not be offended that I offer it——"

"Far, very far from it," interrupted Laura, eagerly, "I shall be soothed, obliged, and flattered by the interest I shall then believe you take in me."

"Those sounds," said Miss Meedon, "announce the return of some of the party. I must now leave you; but to-morrow morning, perhaps——I believe you rise at eight, and except myself, no one

one in the house is stirring at that hour. If you chuse to order your breakfast at nine, I will have the pleasure of making it for you, and we shall be very certain of being *tête-à-tête*, and without much comment or enquiry."

Laura very readily assented to this proposition, and they parted; but the hint of Miss Meedon of the necessity of restraining her inclination so far as not to seclude herself from the society in the drawing-room, or appear to misprize the condescensions of those who affected to regard her favourably, had a proper effect; and as she knew the evening party would not disperse for two or three hours, she summoned sufficient fortitude to join it.

Mrs. Meedon and some of her young inmates were, as usual, at the card-table; but Laura was so entirely disregarded, that she was not even invited to add to the number of its votaries. She attempted to converse with one of the Mornay party; but her overtures were coolly received, and Lady Mary herself was not at home. Poor Fanny was silently working, *à son ordinaire;*

ordinaire; but she forced herself to pass her unnoticed, and the eyes of her new friend applauded her prudence.

At length, when she was resolving to withdraw for the night, Lady Mary returned; and as she entered the drawing-room in apparent high spirits and good humour, Laura ventured to meet her with an extended hand.

"Ah, you wicked runaway!" exclaimed Lady Mary, receiving her advance with affected tenderness; "I was so much hurt this morning at your leaving me without one adieu, that I could have wept! But you know your dominion," added she, "and that every one must love you.—Another time, however, for Heaven's sake, do not go and stupify with such an old *illuminée* as the Dowager Lady Melville, whilst I——Oh, I had the sweetest engagement! But I was so much disappointed when I found you were out, that I almost thought I would not go!"

"I deserve the mortification of this reproach, I confess," said Laura.

"Oh, if you speak with that mien, you disarm

disarm me!" exclaimed Lady Mary: then turning to a *Mornayist*—"How charming she is!" was uttered in a tone sufficiently loud for the Embletons to hear, who, affecting to attend solely to their cards, lost not a word of the dialogue; and Lady Mary, finding by certain symptoms that this was the case, proceeded.

"I have delightful news for you! I saw Horace Nevare this evening, and no subject was obtaining but the fascinating Delaunie. I never heard him so eloquent!"

Laura smiled with a certain expression the eulogist understood.

"*Il ne faut pas se moquer de lui*," pursued her friend, "for you know not how much you are indebted to him! He has composed a beautiful little sonnet, of which you are the subject, and he is to bring it to-morrow morning."

"Matilda, what can you be thinking of?" exclaimed Miss Embleton: "you have ruined me! I had ventured *l'impossible* upon that point!"

The Mornay party, who now gathered assiduously

assiduously round Laura, simpered as they regarded each other; and Lady Mary continued, without permitting Laura to reply to these flattering reports.

"But I profess to you, my sweet friend, Horace is not the only captive you have made; and if you proceed thus, you will rival the enchanting Mrs. Parvian!"

"I have acknowledged my fault of this morning," interrupted Laura; "but as I have not yet offered any atonement, I cannot reasonably complain that your Ladyship should thus amuse yourself at my expence."

"How fatiguingly modest you are, my dear Laura," returned Lady Mary, "when your attractions are in question! I shall not protest, however, to the fact, for to-morrow morning will convince you. *A-propos*—Horace thought you had a name of three syllables; and as I undeceived him, he must make some little alteration in his sonnet, and that is the reason I could not be gratified with a sight of it this evening; but to-morrow he lays it at your feet."

The card party now dispersed, and the garrulous complaints of some, and the more vehement apostrophes of others, overpowered the voice of Lady Mary. Mrs. Meedon, who had been a successful player, enquired of Laura, with more urbanity than she had hitherto exhibited towards her, if she had received the billet of her friend; and when she learned that it had not reached her—"That is strange!" said she. "John even directed the servant of Mrs. Hamilton to Upper Brooke Street in quest of you."

"Lady Melville resides in Curzon Street," observed Laura.

"The *Dowager* Lady Melville!" rejoined Fanny, who now comprehended the mistake: and again Laura secretly exclaimed—"How unfortunate!"

With spirits inconceivably wearied, and personally fatigued likewise, she at length laid her head upon the pillow; but sleep fled her, and every varied subject of anxiety haunted her through the night.—More poignantly than the subject appeared to admit, she regretted the departure

ture of Mrs. Hamilton without having caught an opportunity of entreating her to learn from Mrs. Aubrey, whom no doubt she would see, the cause of her afflicting silence, from which Laura now augured a thousand evils—the sickness of herself, her children, of St. Orme, or Caroline—disgust, displeasure, and the misrepresentation of her conduct by the haughty Cecil, who, offended by the folly of Mr. Rothemere, already viewed her with resentment—each supposition in turn prevailed. Her recent interview with Lady Melville, too, harassed her already agitated mind; and the information she had obtained, that she entirely depended on the bounty of her father, who was a ruined and necessitous man, so she understood, and who evidently, embarrassing himself very little what became of her, was not compelled by any law or obligation to provide farther for her, did not sooth her inquietudes. Lord John, it is true, had said that he would be her friend and her father; but his life was now

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endangered, and his cares, if he survived, directed to another object, which occupied every energy of his mind.

"What will be my destiny?" she exclaimed. "Ah, would to Heaven I were far from this wretched abode, and in some peaceful dwelling, where I should not be compelled to attend to the frivolous pursuits and silly discussions that cannot interest me, but which further aggravate my miseries!"

CHAP. III.

WHEN Dolly attended her in the morning, Laura observed that she appeared several times on the point of saying something, which she repeatedly, however, consigned to oblivion; and at length finding the secret weigh very heavily on the mind of poor Mrs. Maunder, her young Lady enquired

enquired if she had any thing to communicate to her of any importance to either.

"Lord, no, Ma'am," replied Dolly, colouring, "not I!"

Laura, unconvinced by this assertion, proposed to herself to renew the demand at another opportunity; and when she descended to breakfast with Miss Meedon at the hour appointed, instructed Dolly to repeat her visit of enquiry at the house of Lord John.

With her new friend, Laura found her various agitations soothed and diverted; but the conversation of Fanny, and her manners unrestrained by the observing insolence of the fair society, inspired her with a keen regret, that with such a pleasing resource against the miseries that assailed her, almost within her reach, she was compelled to abstain from availing herself of it, except for a few fugitive moments, such as those that were now passing by.

The postman's rap awakened her from the short-lived tranquillity she had

enjoyed; and a moment after a servant entered. Her heart beat quick, and her colour rose; but he carried the letter to her companion.

"Is there not one for me?" exclaimed Laura, in the keenest disappointment.

"I am concerned to have been the means of thus raising and defeating your hopes," said Miss Meedon. "The failure of your correspondent is not very distressing, I hope?"

"Indeed I find it so," replied Laura, with a sigh. "I have expected letters from my Adwan friends hourly, in reply to those I wrote the day after my arrival here; and every morning brings me added mortification."

Miss Meedon was silent a moment, and appeared to be reflecting.

"By whom were your letters taken to the post?" asked she. "Pardon me for tormenting you with this enquiry just now."

"By my own woman, I believe," replied Laura.

Miss Meedon appeared embarrassed, but

but did not pursue the subject; and shortly after they were compelled to separate.

Mrs. Maunder brought word from the housekeeper of Lord John, that she expected in the course of the day, the return of a groom, who had been dispatched to Harwich with letters; but she had not again heard of his Lordship since the last report.

Dolly having repeated this, still lingered in the apartment, under pretence of arranging different things; and from her manner, Laura was now convinced that she was either burthened with some important communication, or wished to make some request: and after she had been urged a considerable time upon the subject, Mrs. Maunder confessed, that if it was quite *agreeable*, she should be glad to be commoded with a part of her wages; but if it was not quite agreeable, she would stay for sartain, as long as Miss Laura pleased, let 'em say what 'em would!

This *eclaircissement* threw her young

Lady into a reverie, by no means the most pleasing she had ever experienced. She had never been accustomed to pay Dolly; and to be thus unexpectedly called upon, led her naturally to reflect from whence her resources were to be drawn, since the Marquis had declared, she understood, that his absence from his native country was fixed for the period of his life, and might probably be of some duration even if he were at length induced to change this strange intention. Laura now believed that by removing her from his own roof, he had meant to insinuate that she was to subsist upon the provision he had already made for her:—that provision, she learned, was by some means annihilated, and to live upon the reluctant bounty of any human being was terrible to her.

Dolly instantly discovered the effects of these embarrassing ideas; and secretly reproaching herself for giving her young Lady pain, abruptly exclaimed—

"Ma'am, I'll do without it—I don't want a farthing—I'll be hanged if I do! What

What should I care what those fine Madams says of me! they're nothing to me, nor never will be, though they're so nacky at winning folk's money. I'm sure if I'd known what I know, they shouldn't have had none of mine."

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Laura, in some surprise: but immediately reverting to the subject that occupied her, she enquired of Dolly what was the sum due to her; who, after many refusals to inform her, or to take a shilling until it was more agreeable, at length said, that when Mrs. Rothemere died, who paid her at her own request only once in the twelve months, there was a year due to her, and since that period six months more.

Laura instantly discharged the debt, spite of the disinclination of Mrs. Maunder to receive the whole of her demand; and then cautioned her not to suffer herself to be deprived of the produce of her servitude, by those who, wanting her probity, possessed the dexterity she lacked: "for if I understand you right," added

she, "you have been a loser at cards with the servants below stairs."

Dolly owned that she had; and having, she said, ordered a few decentish things at a milliner's, 'cause the ladies' maids were all so smart and genteel, she found she had not money enough to pay for them, and she had not the face to do as most of 'em did—take the finery, and tell the folks to call again.—"And God knows," continued she, "they calls enough, what with the mistresses, and what with their *foms*; but they don't get their money the more for calling! I'm sure there be a poor washerwoman, as washes for one of our ladies—if you won't mention it again, Ma'am, it's Lady Augusta; and her weekly bills is nigh upon a guinea a week, and the pore creetur an't been paid these three months; and she says, where to get money to pay her soapboiler, and put bread into her children's mouths, she can't tell, for they're all alike for that matter.—Well, Madam, you see, every now and then Mrs. Meedon lights upon some family in distress, and makes a *description*, and

and those as don't pay for the *description*, she don't fancy, nor indulge in their whimsies: so my Lady Augusta, she pulls out her purse, John says, at the last *description*, and throws down five guineas; and the washerwoman, who was below, she says—'I wish her Ladyship would be pleased to throw down five guineas for me: I'm sure I'm in distress enough!'—So she sends up; and if her Ladyship had not the barefacedness to say, she could not spare nothing then! Well, Ma'am, so the woman——"

Laura, who found her forbearance exhausted, gently interrupted the narrative, by hinting a wish of writing a letter; and Mrs. Maunder withdrew, leaving her young Lady to reflect at her leisure upon her situation in this amiable household, where merit was estimated solely by an accompanying portion of wealth, refined by superiority of rank.

"To whom may I apply?" exclaimed she.

But after a long consideration, no other being occurred to her in the whole

metropolis but Lady Melville; and the idea of consulting Lady Melville was instantly rejected. She found her finances extremely reduced by the recent payment, and some purchases she had made; and the tale of Dolly reminded her that there were inevitable disbursements attending her residence at the house of Mrs. Meedon, which must be provided for.

Perplexed, sick, and dejected, she received at this instant a summons sent by her friend Lady Mary, to remove to the music-room, where Mr. Nevarc awaited her; but unable to command a serene countenance, she was compelled to hazard her displeasure by declining the invitation, when Lady Mary returning in person to the charge, she was dragged from her retreat, and found this youthful Apollo seated at the grand forte-piano, in all the sublimity of composition; so he merely afforded a slight motion of the head at her entrance, and with great *nonchalance* continued his *impromptu sonata*, to the infinite relief of Laura, who endeavoured,

en attendant, to recover in some degree her composure.

The apartment was soon filled with every one of the Mornay party, who were at home; and with their fair chief, they were in the lamented necessity of waiting, *malgré elles*, the conclusion of the piece; because to interrupt it, they were assured would be to fix upon themselves the odium of being entirely tasteless, and fit only to inhabit certain dark and dreary regions, to fill up a concert of howling and teeth-gnashing.

When Mr. Nevarc rose from the instrument, he received the rapturous compliments of the surrounding nymphs with great solemnity; and having turned over some printed music that was near him, he snatched up his hat, and was vanishing, when Lady Mary checked his speed by demanding the sonnet.

"The sonnet!" repeated he, in apparent surprise. Then searching his waistcoat pockets—"I puotest," he added, with a peculiarity of pronunciation Laura had not before observed, "I puotest I have

have lost it—I must have duopped it in the streets."

Laura could scarcely forbear smiling at this assertion, which was so palpably an excuse; and some of the party, who exulted in secret at the mortification they believed she must feel at the circumstance, retired to enjoy the jest at their ease; and the remainder were dispersed in a moment by the entrance of Signor Cantatore: for the appearance of a master of any description, by reviving certain wearying remembrances of past enforced attention, was hateful to them.

Laura was likewise withdrawing; but Lady Mary detained her by an earnest entreaty to remain during the lesson—an entreaty which Cantatore seconded in flattering accents, and with an expression of irresistible sentiment in his countenance. He had already greeted Mr. Nevare very cordially, who, on his part, had silently dropped his hat, and again employed himself in turning the leaves of a music book, whilst the Signor Cantatore having produced an *arietta* of his own composition,

tion, now placed himself in a most captivating and sentimental position—that is, he raised his shoulders to a level with his ears, and held the music he was to read, in so harmonious a style, that his elbows were parallel with his shoulders; then inclining his head in some degree, towards one of his *conoscente* elbows, he raised his eyes so that he could almost contemplate his own brows, and drew his upper lip nearer to his nose, at once to display a fine set of teeth, and illustrate the tender beauties of his author.

So many symptoms of *gran gusto* would have arrested the attention of Horace Nevare, had he not been already perfectly convinced of the superior merit of this modern Roman: but in fact they had more than once trod the stage together, and chanted at the same moment their rage, their griefs, and appeal to the Gods.

When the Signor Cantatore had concluded his *arietta*, which, spite of the absurd grimaces that accompanied the delivery of it, Laura could not avoid admiring, his pupil was called upon, who selected

selected her best song to accredit herself in the distinguishing ears of Horace Nevare, not without the pleasing hope of inspiring a second beautiful little sonnet; which in that case she was resolved by the most watchful care, to preserve from the mischance of the first.

The air was a favourite *bravura*, and the accompaniment rather *forte;* so that the youth "for whom she sung," availed himself of an opportunity an accidental vicinity to Laura gave him, and exclaimed in a low voice—

"Cantatore must have the patience of an angel!—she squalls to-day like a Barbary cat!"

Laura heard this apostrophe with extreme surprise; not only from the tenor of it, but that it was the first sentence he had yet thought proper to address to her: without attending, however, to the sentiment her countenance betrayed, he proceeded, still examining at intervals the notes before him.

"How can you exist amidst such a set of horrid *vivagoes* as you are now associated

ciated with? who are enough to drive a reasonable being to distraction, if he has only the misfortune to be surrounded by half a dozen of them for five minutes!"

Still more astonished at this subsequent observation, Laura turned her eyes to the countenance of the speaker, to ascertain if he really was addressing himself to her: and Mr. Nevarc, half smiling at her incredulous regard, drew a folded paper from his pocket, and laying it before her, desired her to read the contents, *en cachette*, and immediately retired to the other side of the instrument.

Laura offended at the manner in which the *beautiful little sonnet* was offered to her, left it to its destiny, and took a seat: and Mr. Nevarc, who was not unmindful of the danger the lines incurred of being profaned by vulgar eyes, returned them to his pocket with an air of displeasure and chagrin.

When the lesson was ended, and he again prepared to depart, Lady Mary gently reproaching his inattention, he promised,

mised, if possible, to repair his forgetfulness the next day.

"What an absent creature!" exclaimed she: "how unfortunate that he should have neglected to bring the sonnet!—if the Embletons or Lady Augusta hear of it, they will have the impertinence to insist that I composed the circumstance. Here is *mon cher* papa crossing the way to give us a *bon jour!* My dear and charming friend," continued Lady Mary, "will you do me the kindness to hint to him that I am in a little embarrassment at this moment, which only two hundred pounds would relieve me from! I would mention it myself; but really he has lately conducted himself in a manner so reasonable and judicious *vis-à-vis de moi,* that I should feel rather awkward in introducing the subject."

Laura who could not believe it possible that she was serious, told her Ladyship that she had very ill chosen her deputy upon such a topic; and without allowing time for a further discussion, Lord Glendarvon entered the room.

His countenance evinced his satisfaction when

when he discovered by whom his daughter was accompanied; but he was beginning to detail some disappointment he had received the preceding evening, when Lady Mary interrupted him.

"And where do you think this dear cross girl had concealed herself?" demanded she. "At the stupifying deserted mansion of that managing, parading, advice-giving, impertinent old woman, Dowager Lady Melville!"

"My dear Mary," said her father, "I have not the honour of being much in the circle of her Ladyship's associates, but I greatly respect the amiable character of the Dowager Countess; in which I merely concur in the general sentiment she creates, I believe. And if the lovely Miss Delaunie has been so generous as to chase by her presence the cruel chagrin that devours her, I must applaud the gentle compassion of her heart, and submit with a better grace to my own mortification."

"Indeed, my dear Laura," resumed Lady Mary, "if I have been in an error, I entreat your forgiveness; but I always understood

understood your friend Lady Melville to be a very strange and uncommon old woman!"

Laura, who in secret subscribed to the opinion of the daughter, and wholly rejected that of Lord Glendarvon, felt embarrassed to reply without violating her sincerity; and was not displeased that he prevented her the trouble of framing one, by asserting very gravely that Lady Mary had taken up her ideas upon the subject much too lightly.

"What an unfortunate creature I am!" exclaimed she: "I am very sure that nine times out of ten my judgment is faulty! But that is not the only thing I am unlucky in, papa, as Miss Delaunie can inform you. Now do, my amiable and gentle friend, take upon yourself the kind office I mentioned a few minutes back, and I will fly and hide my confusion in my own apartment!"

Before Laura could prevent the accomplishment of this intention, Lady Mary had really vanished, leaving her suddenly and most unexpectedly *tête-á-tête* with Lord

Lord Glendarvon, who was so far from being displeased with this *étourderie* of his daughter, that he laughed at the dexterity with which she had executed it: and intimating that he could well divine the office Laura had been conjured to undertake, declared, that to him she could not make a request in vain.

"My Lord, I have not the presumption to make any," she replied, very much chagrined at the conduct of her *soi-disant* friend. "Lady Mary appears to have sufficient interest to offer her own petitions without my feeble aid, and your Lordship sufficient indulgence to grant any she may prefer."

"The present petition is, as usual, for money, I suppose," returned he: "and it shall be granted in acknowledgment for the opportunity I obtain, of apprizing the enchanting Laura of the admiration she inspires."

Thunderstruck at this avowal, Laura would have followed the example of Lady Mary, and made a sudden retreat, but that Lord Glendarvon observing the hasty

and

and earnest glance she cast towards the door, seized her hand, and detained her.

He now proceeded to expatiate upon a delightful little Opera-box he had recently procured, which would just contain Lady Mary and her charming friend, a *chaperon*—that unnecessary evil—and himself.

"Indeed, my Lord," said Laura, "I cannot——"

His villa at the Thames' side was nearly refitted, he said; and as the spring advanced, he should desire his daughter to use her influence with the lovely Laura, to induce her to pass a few days at it.—"But," added Lord Glendarvon, "may I not hope——"

At this moment the door opened, and Matilda Embleton advanced into the room with a mien of exultation, casting upon the distressed Laura and her noble admirer, looks of ironical satisfaction.

Unable to endure these malicious glances, or to reflect with patience upon the occasion that produced them, Laura was again retreating, when Miss Matilda begged that she might not be so unfortunate

tunate as to disconcert any of her arrangements, as she would withdraw the moment she could find the music she sought.

Confused and shocked by this innuendo, she was unable to utter a syllable, and pursued her way with a quick and faltering step: but as she passed a half-open door, that led she well knew to the apartment of Lady Augusta, her ear was saluted by bursts of tittering laughter, which assured her that the entrance of Matilda Embleton was a preconcerted thing.

From this triumphant merriment she took refuge in her own dressing-room, where in ten minutes she was joined by Lady Mary, who flew to her with a countenance of ecstacy, and kissing her with great affection—

"Oh you most charming, best of friends!" exclaimed she, regardless of the coldness with which Laura almost repelled her caresses; "you have relieved me from a hundred tiresome, dunning wretches, who were the tormentors of my life! But do you know, my father has offered me an Opera-box! My sweetest Laura, you will not

not refuse to accompany me?——Lord, how delightful!—The Embletons will be on the verge of desperation, for having quarrelled with me!"

The mien of Laura, which but too ill responded to all these demonstrations of joy, now met her observation.

"Indeed this is very cruel!" she resumed. "I am never happy and in spirits, but the dearest friend I have, appears to mourn my satisfaction! I am sure I have not intentionally offended you, Miss Delaunie."

Laura now raised her head from the hand on which it rested, and exhibited her face bathed in tears: and Lady Mary, in extreme surprise, demanded why she was thus afflicted.

"From many causes," replied Laura: "my situation here is terrible to me! I have not hitherto been sufficiently accustomed to meet the enmity and contempt of those with whom it is my destiny to associate, to encounter it now perpetually without anguish and apprehension—— Matilda Embleton——"

"I

"I despise her," exclaimed Lady Mary, "and laugh at the whole party! Why, my dear Laura, will not you take the same resolution? If I possessed your beauty—for I declare I think you far handsomer than I am——"

Laura wearied by this unconsolatory nonsense, shook her head from extreme vexation, rather tinctured with impatience.

"Oh I am certain of it!" resumed Lady Mary: "Cantatore declares you are the prettiest figure he ever beheld, except a friend of his, Signora Migliarda, who lived in great *éclat* at Venice: she was the——"

The chaste history of Signora Migliarda was postponed for the present by the entrance of Mrs. Maunder, who delivered to her young Lady a billet, which she said required an answer.

"It is from Mrs. Bergarde," said Lady Mary, who observed the writing of the address.

"The servant has brought another for your Ladyship," said Dolly: "and James

is hunting after Mrs. Simpson to get it delivered to your Ladyship."

"Go then, and inform her," said Laura, "that Lady Mary is here."

Dolly immediately quitted the room for the ostensible purpose of executing this injunction; but she was now too well initiated into the general practice of the house, to subject herself to the hardship of performing the business of another—a piece of philanthropy to which much ridicule was attached, but not the slightest idea of obligation.

"The attention of Mrs. Bergarde is very flattering," said Laura, presenting the billet to her companion; "but my spirits are too much depressed to allow me to profit by it."

Lady Mary having already discerned the purport of the writing, exclaimed—"Will you not go then?"

"I am much honoured by retaining a place in the recollection of Mrs. Bergarde," resumed Laura; "yet at this moment I am so much——indeed, I have been considerably affected by events that have lately

lately occurred, and I cannot without alarm and dread, mix in any society where they will too probably be introduced."

At this intimation the countenance of Lady Mary exhibited symptoms of disappointment, very nearly allied to displeasure, which for the moment however she suppressed, as her woman had now found her way to the apartment, and delivered the billet mentioned by Dolly, which, as Lady Mary supposed, was of the same import as that of her friend.

"I certainly shall not leave you to-morrow evening," said this kind and disinterested young lady: "if you persist therefore in this cruel resolution, I shall likewise send an excuse."

To her importunity Laura might perhaps have yielded, had she not too perfectly recollected the subject of her *tête-à-tête* with Lord Glendarvon: but that alone was sufficient to determine her to avoid any probability of again meeting him; and whilst the discussion was yet at its height, the Dowager Lady Melville was announced, who with a certain ease,

upon which she much piqued herself, again accompanied the servant to the apartment of Laura.

Having greeted her with an air of protection and interest, she turned to Lady Mary, whose person she was not unacquainted with, and thanked her for the amiable and condescending attentions with which she distinguished her young friend, Laura Delaunie.

Lady Mary reflecting on her recent comments upon the character of Lady Melville, blushed a little at her pointed acknowledgments, which she contrived to receive, however, with a grace tolerably assured: whilst Laura, who had no further dwelt upon these *amiable condescensions* than slightly having mentioned to Lady Melville her introduction to Mrs. Bergarde, was rather surprised to find her Ladyship so well informed, because she could not entertain an idea that herself and her history, very variously related, should have become a general topic; and that Lady Melville, though she usually contrived to hear every thing, should learn

learn from any other than herself, of her *début* at the house of Mrs. Bergarde, and the sudden protection and partiality of Lady Mary Mornay.

But in fact Lady Melville was perfectly *au fait* of the whole business, and had received likewise an intimation that the handsome daughter of the Marquis of Bellingham had attracted the peculiar admiration of Lord Glendarvon—a hint that instantly prompted a plan to dispose of the unfortunate Laura with apparent advantage to herself, by promoting the attachment of her noble lover, in the hope of sinking in oblivion the history of the nefarious guardianship, which would never have been enquired into, with *good management* she thought, had the Marchioness but deferred her mad ruin until the girl could have been *properly* married.

Hence the anxiety of Lady Melville that she might even supplant her own daughter in the fickle affections of Mr. Sandby: but the real motive of this strange anxiety Lady Bellingham was not apprized of; because she had not in any degree

been benefited by the scandalous plunder it was intended to cover.

After the exchange of a few sentences between the *parading, advice-giving* Countess and her youthful panegyrist, Lady Mary hoping to obtain in her a powerful auxiliary, recurred to the late subject in dispute, by saying she was compelled to retire, to reply to the billet of her amiable cousin.—"I will inform her servant," added she, "that you, my dear Laura, will send your answer as soon as possible: and let me still conjure you to gratify us, by suffering it to be favourable to our wishes."

This hint had the effect intended; for Lady Melville instantly required an explanation from Laura, and as her companion withdrew, promised to dictate an assenting reply to Miss Delaunie: whom she then lectured, though with great gentleness, upon the imprudence of checking the attentions of such a woman as Mrs. Bergarde, and repelling the kindness and friendship of Lady Mary, by appearing insensible of their value.

Laura wept, but was unable to vindicate

cate herself: she found herself unequal to the task of informing her reprover that the conduct of the Marquis and of her daughter had been already, and might again be discussed in a manner wounding to her feelings; nor could she prevail upon herself to report the disgusting folly, such she thought it, of Lord Glendarvon; and still less could she hint to Lady Melville, that she must endeavour to avoid increasing her casual expences, lest her Ladyship should regard such a communication as a distant demand upon the friendship she professed—an idea that shocked her.

"Dry your tears, my good child," said the Countess, "and oblige me by accompanying Mrs. Bergarde to-morrow to the Theatre of the Marchioness of Rodenwach: it is a place where you will not find yourself *génée* in the least. We must sometimes, Laura, sacrifice our indolent griefs to the world; and it is seldom that by a small exertion of spirit, we may not only overcome them, but conquer our evil destiny. I will now

leave you to write your billet; and your compliance with my request will be considered by me as a proof that you do not reject my esteem and friendship."

Lady Melville then rose, and was quitting the apartment, when Laura made an effort to detain her, that she might endeavour to give some reason for still wishing to decline the attention of Mrs. Bergarde: but her visitor declaring she was at that moment distressed for time, added—"I will see you, or send to you to-morrow morning; and if you should then have any remaining objection, I will myself convey your apology to Mrs. Bergarde, and excuse to her your apparent caprice. *En attendant,* I beg you will write as I wish. —Adieu, my dear child! do not accompany me."

She then conducted Laura back to her dressing-room, and descended the stairs in such haste, that the servants had scarcely time to call her carriage—a celerity that was urged by a disinclination to meet Mrs. Meedon in her retreat, with whom a certain consciousness of responsibility for the bankrupt

bankrupt state of her new inmate, would not allow her to converse with any satisfaction. She hoped, however, that by some means Laura would obtain an establishment before the good woman could possibly have time to make a too rigid enquiry into the particular funds from which she was to receive her ample stipend: but if by any *contre-tems*, this reasonable expectation were frustrated, Lady Melville thought the less intercourse she herself had with Mrs. Meedon, the better.

CHAP. IV.

AFTER her departure, Laura felt herself compelled against her judgment, and still more against her inclination, to send the assent, which to refuse would create to her, she feared, the enmity of Lady Mary, and that of the Countess of Mel-

ville, which she yet more dreaded: but thus extorted, she did it with a very ill grace—a circumstance entirely disregarded by her fair associate, who caressed and thanked her with as much delight, as if the concession had been obtained from the indulgence of friendship.

At the hour of assembling for dinner, which Laura particularly disliked, Lady Mary again entered her apartment, and earnestly conjured her to assume a livelier mien, or she would afford the Embleton party an ill-natured subject of triumph and impertinent conjecture: but Laura vainly essayed to oblige her; for her countenance, spite of her efforts to appear composed, gave evident symptoms of the agitation and anxiety that oppressed her; and the adverse *corps* well justified the prediction, by a number of brilliant sallies sufficiently intelligible to the unfortunate object of their wit, though rather obscure to some of her supporters: whilst every *bon mot* was followed by the animating applause of laughter.

Mrs. Meedon, who deprecated an increase

crease of animosity in these fair, but turbulent factions, neither appeared to lean to the one side or the other, but endeavoured to soften the alarming asperities of both, lest she should herself suffer from it; whilst her daughter, compelled to silence as usual, and fearful of offending by even a casual glance, scarcely looked up.

When Laura withdrew, as she passed the chair of Matilda Embleton, she heard her remark to Lady Augusta in a half whisper, that the Countess of Glendarvon was pensively thinking of her absent love.

"I am surprised," rejoined her companion, "that her daughter-in-law does not exhibit a more dutiful interest than to suffer her thus to retire unattended!"

These hints precipitated the steps of Laura, who took refuge for an hour in her apartment.

"How long must I be subjected to this!" she exclaimed. "Oh my dear Mrs. Rothemere, best of friends! your kindness and tender indulgence but ill-prepared me for such misery, though your lessons and your example might fortify my mind!—

Alone, unprotected, unbeloved of a single being, abandoned by every one, where shall I look for counsel or comfort?"

Her thoughts immediately recurred to Adwan; and she resolved to write once more to Mrs. Aubrey, in the hope of again exciting that interest and compassion she had too much reason to fear this amiable woman had withdrawn from her for an imaginary imprudence, and from a lurking disbelief of the explanation she had endeavoured to give, of the circumstance she so much lamented. She was withheld from again addressing Miss St. Orme, in the mortifying apprehension that the correspondence Caroline had solicited, might have been forbidden by her brother.

"I have no doubt incurred his censure," thought Laura: "and he persuades his sister that I am unworthy of her friendship."

This idea severely wounded her; and assisted by an emotion of pride and conscious worth, she at length dismissed it.

When she returned to the drawing-room, the party was *à l'ordinaire*, much diminished;

diminished; but those who remained, appeared to have retained amongst them all the acrimony of the absentees: and Mrs. Meedon could not by any means make up her accustomed card-party—a disappointment that very much discomposed her temper and serenity; whilst Laura, almost agonized by the many malignant insinuations evidently directed to her, retired before the evening was half closed.

In about half an hour she was followed to her apartment by Lady Mary, who, with a triumphant mien, declared that she had left the society in a most happy state of confusion.—"Lady Augusta is in hysterics," added she, "and the gentle Embletons, who are just returned home, are weeping over her: whilst poor old Meedon, who cannot prevail on herself to move from the board of green cloth, takes up the cards, and shuffles them, reproves Fanny, and orders hartshorn!"

This history did not in the least contribute to restore peace to the bosom of Laura, who dreaded the event of this scene, and felt comparatively happy when

her inconsiderate and nominal friend at length left her to her reflections.

In the midst of her own embarrassments, she could not forbear giving many sighs to the miserable destiny of Miss Meedon, thus the sport of injustice, tyranny, and ill-humour. And when Laura met her in the morning, she was much concerned to observe the pale melancholy of her countenance; but as her mother was leagued with her oppressors, and poor Fanny was very reserved upon the subject of her ill-treatment, she would not allow herself any comment upon it.

Miss Meedon mentioned the dissensions of the preceding evening with inquietude and regret, and avowed a hope that Laura would not materially suffer from them: but it was evidently a hope unaccompanied by expectation.

"I counselled you, my dear Miss Delaunie," said she, "to cultivate the favourable disposition of Lady Mary Mornay; but I almost fear I was wrong: for she is so violent in all her resentments, and so much above censure and controul, that she

she not only creates enemies to herself, but to all those she takes it into her head to patronize. Yet if with this disposition, she had believed herself offended by your indifference, I am certain your situation here would have been still more unpleasant. I must however, if you will pardon the liberty, caution you to repel the advances of Lord Glendarvon, who is a very libertine character, and whose received attentions must discredit any young woman."

"I dislike him extremely!" exclaimed Laura, eagerly.

"I am assured you do," rejoined Fanny; "and it is only an appearance of tolerating him that I mean to guard you against, which the natural complacency of your temper might impel you to, though his sentiments and manners could never obtain your approbation. And I understand that it is almost impossible to attract the particular notice of his Lordship, without attracting at the same time that of the world, and its accompanying sneers."

Laura earnestly thanked her for her sisterly advice, and informing her of her second

second engagement with Mrs. Bergarde, expressed her apprehension of again meeting Lord Glendarvon.

"Tell me, dear Miss Meedon," added she, "what you conceive to be the character of this Mrs. Bergarde? Upon reflection, I fear she is not the *chaperon* Lord John or my Adwan friends would most approve."

"Her character is very Proteus-like," returned Fanny; "for no two people agree in their representation of her: but I have always believed that she is one of those ladies who, allowing themselves all the licence the times may authorize, retain with their pretensions to the appellation of women of honour, the principal requisites that give a claim to the title, in the general estimation. Yet, my dear Miss Delaunie, her attentions are not very favourable to you; for Lord Glendarvon is so notorious, that I fear they may create surmises you would find unpleasant and disadvantageous."

"Yet what can I do?" exclaimed Laura. "I would have excused myself this evening—

evening—I will still do so, if you think I ought: but Lady Melville, the only being who appears at this moment to take any interest in me, not only advised, but urged me to change my resolution: and though I do not by any means wish to consider her in the light of a counsellor or a friend, my deserted situation makes me shrink from the idea of rendering her my enemy."

Miss Meedon secretly regretted that any circumstance should have bestowed upon Laura such an adviser as the Countess: but she experienced a sort of restraining delicacy that prevented her from openly censuring any person for whom Laura betrayed some consideration, limited though it might be; and as she likewise believed that the enmity or displeasure of such a woman as Lady Melville would not fall harmless, the apprehension expressed by her young companion was not without its due force, and she would not venture to advise any measure that might entail upon her the resentment of Lady Mary

Mary Mornay, superadded to the disgust of her ancient adviser.

They separated with mutual regret; and when Laura reflected upon the well-meant caution of Miss Meedon, she experienced a redoubled reluctance to incur the possibility of another interview with Lord Glendarvon, in a place too where his attendance, which was otherwise odious to her, would inevitably be observed.

In the course of the morning, she was addressed by Mrs. Maunder, who approaching her with a countenance of great indignation, informed her that she had been affronted by that conceited thing, Miss Embleton's *fom.*—"For my part," added the aggrieved lady, "I hardly knows how to put up with it; and if it wasn't for your sake, Miss Laura, I wouldn't! To be told by such a trollop as that, who with all her finery, and gold necklaces, and bracesluts, hasn't hardly a shift to her back, Mrs. Simpson says, that I'm a pore ignorant creetur, and not fit to set down with such as she! But I shouldn't have minded that—only she had the

the impurence to say, says she—'We'll soon do for you and your Lady!' says she: 'we'll make you both turn out sooner nor you think for! you and she may go and set folks by the ears elsewhere.—— Such a hubbub as Miss has made up stairs,' says she, 'amongst our ladies! with her fine painted face and her pouts, as if nobody was good enough for company for she!'—Says I, 'You good-for-nothing hussy, to say Miss Laura's face is painted! On my conscience!' says I, 'I believe she is the only one among 'em that an't painted!—But,' says I, 'you have looked so much in the glass, Mrs. Perry, that you an't no great judge of what's pure natural! And how should you?—for I'm sure you never sees any thing but daubing, that's enough to make a cat sick!'—So with that, Ma'am, she hulled her saucer at me, and it's well it didn't take my head—and I makes no more ado, but I gives her as good a smack in the face as ever she had in her life!—so she calls out, 'Murder!' and runs to old Mrs. Meedon's room-door, and went, I suppose, to tell her

her story: but fegs I don't care, not I! ——Who's she I trow!"

Laura was inexpressibly chagrined at this recital, and in the quarrel of these *soubrettes* foresaw new vexations and disturbances; as she had little doubt but Miss Embleton would espouse the cause of her woman. She gently blamed Dolly for permitting herself to feel any anger at the folly and the falsehoods of her adversary, and entreated that for her sake, she would in future disregard the insinuations of Mrs. Perry, and think them unworthy of attention.

Dolly murmured at this injunction, which she said was a very hard one; but at length was induced by the persuasions of her young Lady to *take no more notice, if t'other didn't.*

This affair was scarcely so far adjusted, when Mrs. Maunder was called to the door to receive a letter for her young Lady, which she was told was not to be answered; and Laura found that it was from Lady Melville. She recollected her parting words as it was presented to her, but was

not

not the less surprised to find that it contained notes to the amount of five-and-twenty pounds, and a sentence to the following import:—

"The reluctance you have betrayed, my dear Laura, to mix in a society where you may form very just pretensions to be well received—a reluctance so little accorded to your age and natural disposition, induces me to believe you are not perhaps at this moment supplied with the means of appearing in it, as you might naturally wish. I feel myself authorized, therefore, by the tender and parental attachment I have manifested for you from your infancy, to remove any little embarrassment you may experience by the accidental absence of your friends at this crisis, without any apprehension that the loan I offer you can mortify or offend. The enclosed trifle is now therefore your's; nor can you reject it without renouncing the long friendship

and

and regard by which I believe myself entitled to transfer it to you.

"Should the Marquis not return, or should your future appointments not be adjusted in three months from this time, you shall again be supplied with the same sum. I mention this, that you may be enabled to regulate your own immediate expences. I have taken the liberty of ordering in your name at Madame Doncastre's, several articles you will find indispensably necessary in your more public appearance; which, from respect to your delicacy, I have desired may be charged to you.

"I am, if you will still suffer me to continue so, your's, &c.

"A. MELVILLE."

Laura having read this letter, yet retained it in her hand with a countenance of anxious distress, when a young woman from Madame Doncastre was announced, who entered, laden with several articles mentioned by the Countess, which Laura

soon

soon perceived to be expensive, and to her conception, not very requisite.

The deputy vender having made an *étalage*, instantly proceeded to commend every thing with great dexterity, intermixed with artful homage to the charms of the destined wearer: whilst Laura, shocked at the idea of decking herself thus at the expence of a woman, whose inexplicable and uncommon attentions could alone extort from her an approving thought, would have instantly dismissed this *attirail* of vanity, but that the young person, perceiving perhaps in her aspect symptoms not entirely favourable, took occasion to mention that Madame Doncastre had been particularly careful to procure the things to be finished by the time prescribed, though it *happened* to be very inconvenient, as they *happened* to be particularly distressed for time at that moment.

Laura wishing for an hour of calm reflection, ere she decided how to act, desired the young woman to leave the things, and call again early in the afternoon. But every

every part of the household of Madame Doncastre had received too many proofs of the principles of the fair society in —— Street, to comply with this request, without an effort or two to secure the payment of her demand for the merchandize in question: the girl replied, however, that she would obey her directions.—"Let me consider," added she: "the cap, Ma'am, is only three guineas: this lace is beautiful, and not much cut up—and this dress, Ma'am, trimmed with the same Brussels-ground, is quite a cheap article. To be sure, we could not let you have it but for ready money—that makes such a difference to us! Countess Melville told us we must charge ready money price; or this cap would be four guineas."

At this moment Lady Mary entered, who having expatiated upon the beauty of the finery, declared the cap was the counterpart of one she had just ordered, and pronounced that her friend should take it. Laura with much reluctance drew out her purse to pay for it; but the dress she positively declared against.

"My

"My dear creature, you must have it," said Lady Mary; "you will look like an angel in it! Besides, I was really thinking to persuade you to have something of the kind, for indeed some part of your present equipment is only proper to be consigned to your woman."

"Mrs. Doncastre, Ma'am," rejoined the young person, "made it purposely for you by the direction of the Dowager Lady Melville who had all our people called, to shew which amongst us was your size: and I am sure neither her Ladyship nor yourself will suffer us to become losers by the order."

Laura too inexperienced to parry this argument, and naturally abhorring injustice of every kind, almost in despair produced the notes she had just received; and the girl with great alacrity made out a bill of eighteen pounds, which she presented with a receipt: and hardly crediting her own success, from the slender expectation experience had enabled her to form, she put up the money, and withdrew.

Lady Mary soon followed; and Laura,

then left to her reflections, threw herself into a chair, and with her eyes fixed upon the ground, remained in a deep reverie, repenting bitterly her own facility, and regretting that want of presence of mind she now found so necessary.

"Good Heavens!" she internally exclaimed; "I am then pecuniarily indebted to Lady Melville—to the woman whom not long since———! How inconsistent and injudicious! Can I now refuse to listen to her counsel, however repugnant it may be to my own feelings!"

The entrance of Fanny Meedon now interrupted her self-reproaches; who observing her desponding air, enquired if her mother had been already with her: and hearing that she had not—

"My dear Miss Delaunie," said she, "I come to apprize you of a circumstance I am very much grieved at; yet I scarcely know how to mention it."

Laura earnestly looked at her for an explanation, and poor Fanny was proceeding in a tone of mortification and embarrassment, when the voice of her mother, who appeared

appeared to be approaching the apartment, arrested her explanation; and the tender parent now entering, cast a look of surprise and indignation at her disconcerted child, who precipitately withdrew.

Laura, in the full expectation of an unpleasant scene, silently offered Mrs. Meedon a seat, who received it with a very dignified mien.

"I am come to talk to you," Miss Delaunie," said she abruptly, "upon the subject of your residence here: for to say the truth, I find it so very inconvenient, that I am obliged to beg of you to remove. I would have applied to your friends upon this point, but really I am puzzled to find out who they are."

Laura sighed deeply, and the lady continued—

"I cannot tell how it happens, but really I am compelled to say, I never knew a person make such confusion in any place, as you have created in my house! There is no such thing as sitting in peace at one's meals! I am sure the poorest beggar has

more comfort than I have had since I was persuaded to admit you."

"I am much concerned, Ma'am," interrupted Laura——

"And then," resumed Mrs. Meedon, in a louder tone, "to have my evening parties broke up—upon my word it is insufferable!"

"You will do me the justice to acknowledge," said Laura——

"You must be conscious, Miss Delaunie," rejoined the good lady, overpowering the voice of her young inmate, "that the awkward circumstance attending your connections and—and family, occasioned me to demur for a considerable time; and some of my young ladies were displeased when Lord Bellingham prevailed upon me to consent that you should be here: but his Lordship promised that you should be supported and patronized by several ladies of distinguished rank. Really the Marquis has used me very ill; for instead of introducing you properly, he sends you to me, merely attended by servants, as if my house was a common lodging-house!

However, I would have passed that over; but indeed, Miss Delaunie, I must say your disposition must be a very strange one, for there has never been a single half hour of peace in the whole house, above stairs or below stairs, since you entered it! and your woman is the most gross, ill-mannered——I cannot imagine where you picked her up!—to accuse the confidential servants of people of fashion of winning her money unfairly; and then to attack people like a fishwoman!—Oh fie! If you *did* stay here, Miss Delaunie, you would be required to discharge her instantly—but indeed your continued residence is quite impossible: and I shall think myself obliged, if you will take some measures to remove immediately. Your friend, Dowager Lady Melville, will no doubt advise and assist you. Upon my word, I must say I have been ill-treated in every respect—Lady Melville has been twice here, and has not taken more notice of me, than if I had been———I am sure, ladies of the very first distinction have always paid me the attention of enquiring

for me, at least, and many have made a point of seeing me: but that is not the purpose—what I wish to enforce to you is, Miss Delaunie, that you will pay the very earliest attention to my request of removing, and you will really do me a favour."

At the conclusion of this sentence Mrs. Meedon arose, and Laura, unable to utter a syllable, burst into tears as she shut the door, and wept for some time with a bitterness that almost precluded any idea, but that of relieving her overcharged heart.

CHAP. V.

AFTER a considerable interval, Dolly interrupted her solitude, exclaiming as she entered—

"Well, Ma'am, I suppose the old lady has

has been to scold about me! But lauk, Miss Laura, what's the matter?"

Laura endeavouring to evade, in part, this abrupt enquiry, informed her that they were to remove from the house of Mrs. Meedon immediately.

"So much the better, say I," replied the attendant in a tone of alacrity. "Why sure, Ma'am, you have not been crying for that?"

Laura sighed.—"Not entirely," said she; "but, my good Dolly, I will thank you to go instantly to the house of Lord John, and enquire if his Lordship is better, and if there is any probability of his being soon in town—though I fear that is a hopeless event! I wish you likewise to proceed to Mrs. Hamilton's, and ask of the servants if they have yet received any intelligence of their master and lady; or if they have any reason to suppose either the one or the other will return shortly. I am extremely impatient to learn this, Dolly, because it would influence my future movements."

Mrs. Maunder declared she would make

all the haste she could; and without losing a moment of time, retired to equip herself for the mission.

In her absence Laura sought Lady Mary Mornay, in the hope of being excused from accompanying her in the evening, to which she now felt a still more insurmountable repugnance.

When her *soi-disant* friend beheld her tell-tale eyes, she enquired as Dolly had done, into the occasion of the tears she had so evidently shed.

"I am very unhappy," replied Laura, sighing: "but it would occupy too much of your Ladyship's time, to relate the many reasons that combine to render me so! I wish to entreat you, dear Lady Mary, to have the charity to leave me here to-night, and condescend to carry my excuses to Mrs. Bergarde; for, independent of other circumstances, I am at present much embarrassed by an intimation I have received from Mrs. Meedon, that she desires I would quit her roof; which at this particular moment is very distressing, and I have not spirits——"

"Has

"Has old Meedon really had the impertinence to do so?" interrupted Lady Mary, in the utmost indignation. "Well, my dear Laura, you shall be amply avenged, and she shall repent this abominable trick—a stupid old simpleton! Papa is just now in a humour to suffer me to act as I please, and I will leave her frightful old roof too, with as many as I can persuade to be of my opinion! For Heaven's sake, be not thus chagrined concerning these embarrassments!—If I had the good fortune to be as handsome as you really are, I should laugh at every thing that could befal me:—one half of the world will hate you, it is true, but the other half will never allow that you can be wrong, do what you will."

Laura, far less philosophical than her Ladyship on this subject, shook her head; and not in the least desirous of the revenge thus projected, begged her not to decide it hastily, and again urged her to become her advocate with Mrs. Bergarde, if she failed in her engagement.

"My amiable friend," returned Lady

Mary, "is it possible that you can be so very simple as to afford them such a triumph? I declare to you I would in your situation torment them to the utmost, by appearing all gaiety and happiness; and rather than not seem to have an engagement every night, I would even slumber a whole evening at Mrs. Bradley's *conversazione*, or play shilling Cassino with Lady Grunter and her nieces!"

A carriage now stopping at the door, Lady Mary from long habit walked to her window, to descry who the visitor might be.

"It is the Dowager Lady Melville!" said she: "but, my dear Laura, come hither! that frightful looking——now do hasten—that ugly, vulgar—who is now crossing, is the *bien-amié* of Matilda Embleton! I would give twenty guineas this minute, to see the sickening scene that will be acted in the cooing-room!"

"The cooing-room!" repeated Laura with surprise, and an involuntary emotion of curiosity.

"Is it possible," resumed Lady Mary, "that you could be ignorant that the little drawing-

drawing-room below stairs, which is appropriated for the convenience of any of the society who have lovers, is called by our witty Misses the cooing-room! Hark! there is poor James running about to find you!"

Laura, who never felt less alacrity, received with a very heavy heart the summons to attend her visitor: the pecuniary obligation forced upon her by Lady Melville, was now to be acknowledged with apparent gratitude, whilst, though she reproached herself with her sensations, she could not regard it as a benefit.

Lady Melville met her with an affectation of redoubled condescension, and taking her hand—

"I promised you, my amiable Laura," said she, "to enquire this morning if your reluctance to emigrate from your apartment still continued; and I now present myself to disengage my parole: but those eyes speak a language I am sorry to observe."

Laura, waving an immediate reply to this hint, compelled herself to advert to

the contents of the letter she had recently received; but Lady Melville would not suffer her to proceed with her acknowledgment: and from her repeated enquiry, Laura found herself in the necessity of explaining the cause that had called forth those tears the discernment of the Countess had traced upon her countenance.

On learning the peremptory declaration of Mrs. Meedon, she was for a moment very thoughtful; and after some consideration, sent to know if the good old lady were at home, and visible The servant returning with an answer that Mrs. Meedon would be very glad of the honour of speaking to her Ladyship, she left Laura to hold this solemn conference, which was of considerable length, and was not concluded when Dolly returned from her double embassy.

Mrs. Maunder reported that it was not known how long Mr. Hamilton or his Lady would be absent; but the servants had told her that Captain Rothemere would have his own way, and get back to his quarters too soon, that he might have company

company and be *joval;* and so he had been took with a violent fever, and nobody thought he would live. And as for Lord John, to be sure he was something better, but not fit to be moved yet; though Dolly said, it was thought the moment he could sit up, he would go on to foreign parts, to try to get at the Marquis, and fetch him back; for he was going on finely with his extravagant Madam, and that fretted the poor old Lord, they said, and made him worse.

This intelligence was far from soothing to the mind of Laura, who was now almost confirmed in her fears, that she must of necessity become still further indebted to the friendship Lady Melville so freely professed for her: and with increasing palpitation, she waited the result of the interview with Mrs. Meedon.

At length the Countess re-appeared with a countenance rather less calm than she had first worn; but with a voice of forced composure, she informed Laura that it was settled she should quit —— Street the next day.

"My

" My house is open to you, my dear child," continued Lady Melville: " for the sake of my unfortunate Emily, who loved you so entirely, I cannot abandon you, as others have done; nor indeed would my own attachment suffer me to hesitate a moment, when your well-being is so much in question. I am convinced too, that in thus entailing upon myself anew the anxiety and watchful care of a parent, I shall experience from you the affection and duty of a beloved daughter."

Laura could not at this moment even analyze her confused and contradictory sensations; and the acknowledgment she laboured to utter, refused to pass her lips: she trembled, and the colour forsook her cheeks; but the relief of a single tear was refused to her agitation. She felt as though she was standing on the brink of a precipice, and every friendly hand that could withdraw her from it was retiring far from her.

Lady Melville perceiving her extreme emotion, said she would leave her to tranquillize her spirits; and desiring her to prepare

prepare for her removal early the next day, she was departing, but suddenly turned back.

"I wish you," added her Ladyship, "now more particularly to fulfil your engagement this evening, as I have peculiar reasons for desiring that you should cultivate the favourable sentiments of Mrs. Bergarde."

"It will be a most painful and irksome task," said Laura: "but as your Ladyship thus urges——"

Lady Melville interrupted her to applaud this extorted compliance; and again adverting to their meeting on the following morning, for which she named the hour, she at length left the wretched Laura to reflect with astonishment and terror, upon the fatal circumstances that combined to cast her thus wholly into the protection of a woman, she never from early childhood could love or respect.

In this situation of mind, she was entirely unequal to the misery of sitting at table with Mrs. Meedon and her society; and

and with very great truth, pleaded indisposition to excuse herself.

When Dolly attended to assist in altering her dress for the dreaded evening, she affirmed with much satisfaction, that she had packed up her own clothes, and would set about the same office for her young Lady, the moment she had left her apartment; and she would warrant to get it all done before she laid her head to rest.—"As for the people in this house," added Mrs. Maunder, "I would toil on my marrow-bones thruff the whole night to get away from they an hour the sooner: for of all the mischievous, backbiting, foul-mouthed crew I ever came nigh, I do think they are the worst! To hear the pack of stories they'll make you up, all in a moment, of people that they takes it into their heads to be affronted with, it's enough to make one go crazed, when you know all the time that the folks are as innocent as the babe unborn, of the *clammies* they throws upon 'em! We can't be worse off, go where we will, than we be in this place;—to be sure, old Lady Melville

Melville an't the saint she'd make believe to be, but nothing can be worser than this!"

"Who informed you," demanded Laura, "that I should remove to the house of Lady Melville?"

"Who, Miss Laura!—why every body, Ma'am! They've the imperence to say now, that you are tooked out of charity, and more than that——"

"No matter, Dolly," interrupted Laura, in a disconsolate voice: "but I must hasten, or I fear Lady Mary will be compelled to wait for me."

This indeed would have been the case, had she not been recalled to a remembrance of the manner in which she was obliged to pass the coming hours, by the rattling of a carriage that drove to the door; and rousing herself from the inactivity of sorrow, Laura then hastened both her attendant and herself.

Considerably after the appointed time, the carriage of Mrs. Bergarde called for Lady Mary and her friend; and instead of taking tea and coffee with her, they had only time to stop at her door, whilst she

she hastened to them; and the party were then driven towards Rodenwach House, which was three or four miles from Hyde Park Corner.

Mrs. Bergarde apologized for these hurried marches and counter-marches, by informing her young companions that the whimsical Horace Nevarc had sent to entreat that she would give him a corner in her carriage, as he should be obliged to remain in town until a late hour, and had sent back his curricle.—"I have therefore awaited him until the present moment," added Mrs. Bergarde, "and equally awaited you; for my servants did not comprehend my instructions, and did not conceive that they were to call for you, until I enquired into the meaning of the delay. About ten minutes back, Mr. Nevarc sent an intimation that I should not expect him, the *etourdi* having encountered a friend, whom he meant to conduct to the mansion of his mother and her s—r—ne spouse. I know not," she rejoined, "how Miss Delaunie will think herself reimbursed for the inconvenience

nience of hurrying thus early to the theatre of the *Marchioness;* but I fear if her H—gh--ss performs as usual, the varied characters of nymph, witch, goddess, fairy, virgin, wife, and widow; and sings, dances, descends from clouds, draws magic circles, and buffoons in every distinct apartment, our young friend will follow the example of her general audience, and yawn to the chorus of—' *Oh, que je m'amuse!*"

"Your *critique* is too severe," said Lady Mary, laughing: "as for the Marchioness, I acknowledge if she would not sing such long recitatives of her own composing, with the quavering voice of an old woman of sixty, it might be better. But Horace Nevarc is really charming—you must allow that."

"He is a strange young man," replied Mrs. Bergarde; "but I believe him to be a good creature with all his eccentricity; and I suspect he is completely fatigued with this acting mania."

"It is not then entirely a voluntary exertion?" asked Laura, who thought it necessary

necessary to appear to take some interest in the conversation.

"Without being indebted to the bounty of the Marchioness," replied Mrs. Bergarde, "he has the portion of a younger brother: but he is the favourite child, and having great expectations from her partial tenderness, he compels himself to submit to her caprices, which I believe to be almost as intolerable as her violent *emportemens*, of which the good man her husband is generally the object."

"Whilst the object of her distinguished favour," rejoined Lady Mary, "may often be found, I understand, amidst the grooms of the *Marquis!*"

"Oh fie!" exclaimed Mrs. Bergarde: "the mother of my favourite Horace shall not be thus scandalized! She has assuredly a trifling degree of the *poissarde* in her character, and is passably whimsical and capricious; but whilst we accept her tickets of admission to the exhibition of her sublime talents, let us be silent upon the most serious part of the farce."

When the carriage stopped, Laura mechanically

chanically descended from it; and scarcely able to command her attention towards local objects, found herself almost immediately in a large conservatory, to which she had followed her companions. The moonbeams that entered it from the glass front, and the odour of the plants, made a pleasing, though almost imperceptible impression upon her senses; and with feelings more calm and serene, she awaited the motions of her conductress.

Mrs. Bergarde having learned from a servant, that it would be yet nearly half an hour ere the representation would probably begin, determined to remain for the present where she was, rather than mingle before it was absolutely necessary, with the motley audience, amidst whom it was not unusual to distinguish the butcher, tallow-chandler, and other tradesmen of the hamlet where the theatre of Rodenwach exhibited to the swans of the neighbouring stream, its Gothic ruins of modern structure.

Laura was not displeased with this resolution; for the moonlight scenery, which a few

a few lamps amidst the exotics, still allowed the eye to ascertain beyond the lawn where the conservatory stood, soothed her mind; but in a few moments the voice of a person expressing a wish to give wings to the present hour, forcibly reminded her that when a few more had sped their flight, she would too probably be under the roof and the guidance of Lady Melville, whose conduct was an enigma she vainly wished to solve.

"And is this indeed inevitable?" thought Laura: "have I then no alternative, but to remain in the house of a woman who is earnestly desirous of expelling me from it, and to whom my continued residence may become very injurious?"

She thought for a moment of flying to the residence of Mrs. Hamilton, absent though she was; but this idea was soon rejected, for many reasons; and with a sigh, she endeavoured to turn her reflections from the subject: yet her reverie was still so profound, that she was unconscious of the presence of Horace Nevare, who had explained his conduct to the apparent satisfaction

satisfaction of Mrs. Bergarde, and was pronouncing an eulogium upon her good-natured compliance with *his* request of honouring with her presence the approaching representation—" For which," he added, " I must now prepare."

He then called to a superior domestic, and giving him instructions to attend to the peculiar accommodation of the party, he hastily disappeared.

A few moments after, three ladies entered, who were known to Mrs. Bergarde and Lady Mary; and whilst they were discussing with some interest, a few topics, unimportant to any but the circle in which they moved, Laura, who had been drawn from her abstraction by their mingled voices, turned in disgust from anecdotal scandal, and again fixed her eyes upon the landscape, now more distinctly seen, because some of the folding doors of the conservatory had been thrown open.

Near one of these, two stationary figures now appeared, which intervening between her and the scene she regarded, impelled her attention: a servant the next instant passing

passing the lawn with a flambeau, displayed the features of St. Orme in one of these figures; and Laura recognised them with a change of countenance so conspicuous, and a start so impressive, that Lady Mary observed her emotion.

"My dear Laura," exclaimed she, "*I* was likewise terrified! I thought the sudden glare had been lightning: but I am quite a heroine to you. How you tremble! and you are as pale as death!"

Mrs. Bergarde enquired into the occasion of her terror, and Lady Mary fortunately explained it in her own way; for Laura was too much agitated to return a satisfactory answer. The torch and the figures had alike vanished; and as she moved forward with the party, which was now much increased, she almost believed the momentary view that had so much discomposed her, had been illusive.

They immediately entered the theatre, which was small; and the box reserved for Mrs. Bergarde could not entirely contain her additional companions, who placed themselves, however, with the utmost possible

possible convenience to themselves; and being much more solicitous upon this subject than the thoughtful Laura, she remained standing a few seconds, unregarded either by Lady Mary or their fair *chaperon*, who experiencing a sentiment of disgust at the *distraite* mien and countenance of her young associate, which because she had been herself discomposed and chagrined in the course of the day, she chose to impute to sullenness or impertinence, secretly resolved to give herself as little trouble concerning her as possible.

A gentleman in the neighbouring box, decorated with the star of a foreign Order, instantly rose, and offered his seat to Laura, which Mrs. Bergarde coolly desired her to accept; and the stranger either affecting ignorance of our requisite ceremonials of introduction, or chusing to suppose that his civility authorized the exchange of a few sentences, placed himself behind Laura, and addressed to her in broken English, some general remarks upon the decorations of the place.

"Mais regardez," added he; "I believe

her H—gh—ss is now pipping at her audience, la bas, behind de grin silk curtain, in de private boxe! C'est une femme rempli de talens, mais——" and with a most emphatic pause, he took a large pinch of snuff.—"Bot she find de art," resumed the talkative foreigner, "to attrac to her teatre de ladies célébres for dier vertue, ainsi que par dier beauté!"—And he regarded Laura with an air that desired her to appreciate the remark: but finding that it was not properly interpreted—"Ici, in Engande," concluded he, with a sarcastic smile, "les fêtes, breakfastes, bals parés, le masque, and litel soupers, are de cercles magiques where all de Nobles des deux sexes, se trouvent par un enchantment, which vil not let dem see when de wand dat draw dem to it, be wield by de hand of de diable!—Ah, enfin, de curtain rise!"

He was however mistaken; for the curtain rose not, neither did any one appear in the center box, appropriated to the particular friends of the *Marchioness*.

"It is past nine considerably!" exclaimed

claimed Mrs. Bergarde: "what can be the meaning of this tedious delay?"

A whispered murmur ran through the house: the orchestre played piece after piece, but still the curtain shut out the stage.

Laura, occupied by her confused reflections, and directing her eyes to every part of the house, in the intuitive hope of again beholding the fleeting vision that had been presented to her in the conservatory, observed not these symptoms of an extraordinary occurrence, nor did she hear the further remarks of the stranger.

At length a person came from the scenes, and bowed.

"It is old Count D'A———," cried Lady Mary, "the grandpapa of the Rodenwach stage!"

"C'est le chambellan!" said the foreigner.

The chamberlain bowed a second time; and began an harangue in French, that portrayed the despair under which her S—r—ne H—gh—ss laboured, that she had been compelled by the arrival of an

extraordinary courier from a certain Court, to leave with abruptness so polite, admiring, well-disposed, and patient an audience: but circumstances of *imperial* moment had obliged her H—gh—ss to depart immediately for V———, where she was about to obtain a *new* character, which she should be happy to exhibit to all the world!—"And upon her instant return to England, her friends, admirers, and neighbours of the hamlet might be assured her H—gh—ss would not fail to perform the *Précieuse Ridicule*, which she graciously flattered herself might be succeeded by the admired character of the Brilliant Widow! *En attendant*, her H—gh—ss had purposely left behind her her principal *femme-de-chambre*, a very excellent substitute, who would have the honour of reading her part to the audience."

This obliging care of the condescending Marchioness was very much commended and applauded, and the *new* character, thus announced, very much canvassed: every one who was in habits of friendship with

with the Count, enquired very earnestly what it was that was hinted at; and the poor man besieged on every side by a variety of *impromptu* conjectures, protested that the additional honour of being raised to the rank of Princess of Georgia by the Grand Signior was rather a premature report, the patent for that dignity not having yet arrived from the Sublime Porte!

The party who had joined Mrs. Bergarde were earnest to be gone; and as their carriage was in waiting, they soon vanished. Lady Mary then desired her *charming* friend to take the vacant seat beside her; and whilst Laura complied with this intimation, Mrs. Bergarde, whose eyes were fixed upon the *green silk curtain*, received from thence a signal, unobserved by her young companions, which determined her to remain, notwithstanding the defection of her travelling H—gh—ss.

After some further delay, the representation began, and Mr. Nevare appeared upon the scenic boards with the fair *femme-de-chambre*, who was a much better figure

for a youthful damsel than her very serene Lady: yet Mrs. Bergarde excessively disapproved the exchange, apostrophized the insolence of the Marchioness in thus compelling people of fashion to witness the awkward efforts of her servants, and her vivacity and temper appeared to forsake her at the same moment.

"If Horace were not upon the stage," said Lady Mary, "I should assert that his eyes were fixed upon us from the reconnoitring box! Who can it be?—he regards us very earnestly!"

Laura looked towards the green silk curtain, which had been pointed out to her by the stranger, and with a fluttering heart, imagined that she recognised the eyes of St. Orme, the shade of whose figure was likewise discernible; but a little commotion behind her impelled her attention at this instant, and the unwelcome countenance of Lord Glendarvon met her sight.

Mrs. Bergarde did not appear to behold him with greater symptoms of delight than Laura; indeed her salutation was very

very reserved, and she enquired with more of vexation than curiosity, how he had contrived at so late an hour to procure a ticket—an enquiry his Lordship thought proper to evade.

Lady Mary, with filial attention, gave him a place between herself and Laura, who in the interim had cast many an anxious glance towards the green silk curtain; but the object she had so earnestly sought, had disappeared: and she now found herself compelled to reply to the detested attentions of Lord Glendarvon, and the sprightly nothings of his daughter, whilst her imagination was busily employed in accounting in every way the most distressing to her feelings, for the conduct of St. Orme. The unfeeling folly of Captain Rothemere, in which perhaps he had made her appear a partner, by representing her as his informer of the unpleasant predicament in which St. Orme then was, had given, she thought, the first impression of disgust, and the very improper intrusion of Biranly had finally stamped her character with him. Why else did he

avoid her, and refuse her an opportunity of uttering one short sentence of enquiry for her Adwan friends?—Her friends! they were evidently no longer so, or St. Orme would have been commissioned at least, with letters for her!

"My sweet Laura," said Lady Mary, "I never saw you so entirely absent: my father has asked you several times if you would not remove to the refreshment rooms!"

"You appear indisposed, Miss Delaunie," observed Mrs. Bergarde, in an accent that expressed very plainly, she herself did not credit this appearance: "will you take the air in the conservatory?"

Laura very eagerly assented to this proposition; and the first act of the piece being concluded, the party then quitted this serene theatre, leaving their seats with great *nonchalance*, to the occupation of the next comers—a circumstance Mrs. Bergarde was not in the least anxious to prevent; on the contrary, she rather sought an excuse to remain *incog.* for the rest of the evening.

The

The sedulous attendance of Lord Glendarvon now gave her suspicions of more serious attentions towards Laura, than she had originally supposed him to have entertained; and whether they were of a nature to be avowed, or otherwise, she equally deprecated his success:—if his Lordship meant an honourable alliance, her family would be considerably disappointed in every branch of it; and if his pursuit were of a contrary nature, she was ill treated in having been induced by the unsuspected entreaties of Lady Mary, to receive the girl.

In the conservatory they encountered the foreigner, who was an envoy from the ——— Court, and well known to Lord Glendarvon: their principles were indeed so similar, and the degree of sympathy in opinions and pursuits so considerable, that when these Noblemen became acquainted with each other, the habits of friendship and intimacy quickly followed. For the Baron de ——— was one of those diplomatic *débauchés*, who so frequently pass from one country to another, to guard

with an eye of vigilance their national interests, and stain by shameless profligacy, their national character. He was, to use the gentle phrases, an admirer of beauty, and a man of pleasure!—and Lord Glendarvon gave him by a recommendatory introduction, a title from thenceforward to pour his principles and his opinions into the ready ear of his youthful daughter.

The Baron, charmed with his good fortune, in becoming known to three women he had extremely admired, was uncommonly lively and assiduous: he procured by some particular interest, refreshment before the time in which it was generally distributed, and enlivened every countenance by his vivacity. Even Laura, anxious and distressed though she was, could scarcely refuse a passing smile to the sallies that met her ear; but her eyes with an involuntary emotion, turned perpetually towards the spot where she had so unexpectedly beheld the features and figure of St. Orme.

The moon was now more resplendent, and gave to the spectator not only the gently

gently varying level of the lawn, but the fair stream that rolled its illumined wave beyond it; and Lord Glendarvon mentioned *a promenade al fresco.*

His friend the Baron seconded the proposition; and offering his immediate attendance to Mrs. Bergarde, led the way to the river side.

"C'est singulier," exclaimed he, "dat I never admire de outside of dis petite teatre, so moch as jost de moment when dey are in de midst of acting dier pieces choisies in de inside—at dose time, I tink dese littel tours passablement prettie! c'est vrai, dey are very modernes, and s'efforcent d'avoir an air ancienne; mais apparemment her H—gh—ss tink dat quite as possible, as etant diablement ancienne to ave very modernes prétensions!"

Mrs. Bergarde smiled; but at the same time affirmed that she had actually witnessed good acting in this little theatre, and a display of talents really admirable.

"I am sure Horace Nevare is a charming actor," said Lady Mary: "I have

heard several people declare that *his* talents and judgment are indisputable!"

"Oüi surement!" rejoined the Baron, very gravely: "I ave heard de same ting more dan hundred time! Mais que vois-je la bas? Est-ce un voleur—is it a tief, ou bien un amant delaissé?—bon, il revient sur ses pas! he come dis way!"

"I am terrified!" exclaimed Lady Mary: "we shall be robbed!" and she clung to the arm of Mrs. Bergarde.

"You, my lovely Laura, are not alarmed, I hope," said Lord Glendarvon in a low voice: then perceiving that she trembled excessively as the cause of her agitation approached, he added in a louder accent—"You have nothing to fear—you shall be protected from insult and impertinence."

"It is not from me, I trust, that either the one or the other can be apprehended," said the voice of St. Orme: and Laura, almost sinking at the well-known sound, vainly endeavoured to regain sufficient courage to address him, and was consider-

considerably indebted to Lord Glendarvon for the support she very much required.

"The air is cold," said Mrs. Bergarde, who now secretly thought herself justified in accusing her of possessing a spirit of coquetry: "if Miss Delaunie does not object, we will return."

St. Orme now suddenly stopped, and Laura believed he waited her reply; but when she essayed to speak, her throat and mouth became parched, and Mrs. Bergarde continued—

"For myself, I must take shelter in the conservatory: Lady Mary will perhaps continue with Miss Delaunie."

"Oh no, Laura will excuse me!" exclaimed she; "I am shivering with the terror I have sustained: but papa will remain with her!"

"I think it will be prudent if the whole party give up this airy promenade," resumed Mrs. Bergarde, incensed at the ill-construed silence of Laura: "permit me, Miss Delaunie, in this instance to advise."

Laura, overcome by long inquietude, and a variety of conflicting emotions, beheld

beheld St. Orme retreat with a quickened pace; and this confirmation of the contempt she had before suspected, chilled her very soul, and she fainted.

On recovering her recollection she found herself surrounded by women, and in a private apartment of the mansion. Mrs. Bergarde with a countenance of solicitude regarded her; and Laura not yet sufficiently collected to know what she did, snatched her hand, and earnestly pressing it with an entreating motion, burst into tears.

"Compose yourself, my dear Miss Delaunie," said Mrs. Bergarde; "I have ordered my carriage, and you shall, if you wish it, be immediately taken home. I am displeased with my want of observation, in not sooner discerning the severity of your indisposition."

Lady Mary now introduced her tender enquiries, to which Laura with some exertion compelled herself to reply: and having with still greater effort rallied her strength and spirits, she was enabled to walk to the carriage when it was announced:

announced: Mrs. Bergarde replying to her expressions of concern that she should thus accelerate her departure, by declaring that she would have hailed with avidity any other cause for leaving the place.

Lord Glendarvon and his friend expressed in animated terms the concern her sudden illness had given them; and the father of the discreet Lady Mary, as he assisted the fair invalid to the carriage, found an opportunity of intimating that he should make a personal enquiry at her door the next morning—a hint that almost reconciled her to her new abode, where she hoped he would not obtain so ready an admittance; for Lord Glendarvon was become not only odious to her, but absolutely repugnant: and she was much pleased when Mrs. Bergarde, who had withstood every indirect effort of her noble relative to return into town with her, absolutely refused his more open application in a tone of peevish displeasure.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

AS the attachment of Lady Mary could not induce her to pass two or three stupid hours with her *charming friend* previous to her *coucher*, she proceeded to the house of Mrs. Bergarde; and Laura being taken at her own request to ——— Street, retired immediately to her apartment, where she was in a few moments sought by Fanny Meedon, who at her entrance observed with surprise and anxiety, her pallid and altered countenance.

"I know not," said she, taking the hand of Laura, "if I am justified in feeling concern that you are so abruptly quitting this house, since your residence in it has been so extremely unpleasant to yourself. Yet I have not been able to hear

hear it without regret, whilst to you most probably the change is highly gratifying."

"Oh no!" returned Laura, with a sigh: "had I been indeed returning to the society from which I was separated when I was brought to town, my only concern would have arisen from the knowledge of that injustice you experience, and from the loss of your conversation in these short intervals when I can thus obtain it: but as it is——"

"I thank you for your good opinion," returned Miss Meedon; "it is pleasing and consolatory to me. May I," she added, "enquire if I am informed right —do you reside with the Dowager Lady Melville when you leave us?"

"Her Ladyship gives me admission to her house," said Laura, in a melancholy accent, "from compassion of my unfriended situation: for, herself excepted, I know not one single being now in London who would be equally hospitable to me! Yet spite of my efforts to think with

proper

proper thankfulness upon a condescension so very considerate and kind, to you, my good Miss Meedon, I will venture to confess, that I cannot contemplate my removal to the roof of Lady Melville, without repugnance and inquietude."

"It is an inquietude," returned Fanny, "which the esteem and affection I have conceived for you, urge me to share: for I have sufficient experience of the effect of that protection extended by women of fashion to any unfortunate whom accident or relative situation places in their power, or under their guidance. I know not how it is that they appear to be so generally formed without reflection or compassion, unless it may be traced from the too general absence of proper pursuits, which supplied by idleness and dissipation, must render them the creatures of caprice, whilst the universal depravity of principles and manners (I speak only from what I have witnessed), erases justice and mercy from the heart, torn and divided by passions with which the gentle virtues

virtues cannot associate. You, my dear Miss Delaunie, can only however become casually subjected to the injurious decisions of ill-humour and conscious depravity, until the sanction of riper years enables you to select your own society, or until the advantages you possess, procure you a proper establishment."

"You do not perhaps know," interrupted Laura, "that I am wholly destitute of fortune."

"On the contrary," replied Fanny, "the Marquis informed my mother that you possessed one independent of himself."

"It is gone, it is lost," said Laura: "so Lady Melville tells me; and I believe, from other circumstances that corroborate her assertion, that it is too true."

"This is very strange!" exclaimed her companion, musing. "Lady Melville I know is neither kind nor compassionate; nor does she now borrow the semblance of these amiable qualities, but to accomplish one of those projects her imagination is said to be so fruitful in conceiving. She is generally distinguished by the name of the

the Dowager Countess Machiavel; and she is said to pique herself upon her superiority in the arts of *cajolerie*, the eloquence of persuasive oratory, and her management in preserving the confidence and good opinion of a ruined dupe, to avert those *éclats* which would otherwise happen. The term of ingratitude which you have used in describing the effect the conduct and deportment of Lady Melville produce upon your mind, is the mere unconscious withdrawing of rectitude and innocence from the duplicity they abhor; and to prove it to you, I will venture to impart a transaction of her's not generally known, of which I can vouch the truth. In some of her various speculations, she had with some difficulty induced the industrious father of a large family to hazard the produce of many years of industry, which he entirely lost: and Lady Melville having beheld with an unfeeling eye his youthful daughters falling the victims of misery and vice, took to herself with a callous heart, all the parading merits of a patroness, in withdrawing one of them from the

the Magdalen, where she was discovered to possess a fine voice, that it might be cultivated for the stage. Can such a woman be generous or just? You are alarmed, my dear Miss Delaunie, and I am grieved to convey to you suspicions so painful, whilst I think it right to conjure you to be ever on your guard with Lady Melville. You are young and very lovely, and I fear she may intend to speculate upon your future happiness; but do not too readily credit her assertion with respect to your fortune: your friends will soon return, I hope, to claim you from her; do not in the interim suffer her to precipitate you into any action or concession you cannot yourself entirely approve."

"You have indeed increased my agitation and uneasiness," said Laura, embracing Miss Meedon, "yet I thank you for your generous caution: I would not suffer my own past observation, inconsiderable as it was, to influence me sufficiently, because I feared to become unjust, and reproached my heart with unthankfulness. But tell me, my kind friend, what

what can I do?—Can I now avoid going to her house? Yet what do I say?—is there another that at this moment will receive me? Were Mrs. Hamilton in town, I would request the protection she would not refuse: but she is detained by the dangerous indisposition of her brother from her home, and if business should oblige Mr. Hamilton to return singly, my residence there would be improper, and any intimation of such a wish would distress and inconvenience them. Surely, however, I am too insignificant to be the subject of any of Lady Melville's plans:—she has known me from infancy, and always professed much attachment for me: may she not then experience a ray of compassion for my neglected situation?"

"I forgot in my anxiety," exclaimed Fanny, "how late it is! The card-party will soon break up; but to morrow morning, my dear Miss Delaunie, I will meet you at eight: we will then, if you think proper, renew the subject."

Laura was fearful of detaining her; and poor Miss Meedon from the moment she

recollected the lateness of the hour, dreading an unpleasant interruption, hastily quitted the apartment.

Laura closed not her eyes the whole night, which she passed in alternate reflections upon the conduct of St. Orme, and her approaching dependance upon Lady Melville. The absence of Lord John Traherne at a moment so critical, and the cruel occasion of that absence, she could not cease to regret: and to no other individual of the family of the Marquis, was she personally known. She had understood their general character to be haughty, severe, and forbidding; and she shrunk from the idea of making any application to them. Of the relations of her mother she had never heard, though she had some recollection of having been formerly told that her maternal ancestors were not of this country.

Thus insulated as it were, she looked round her with dread; and the silence of Mrs. Aubrey and Caroline St. Orme, united with the pointed and contemptuous disregard of her brother, cast a damp upon her

her heart, that ill qualified her to encounter her future uncertain destiny.

At length the morning dawned, and the hour of her appointed *tête-á-tête* with Fanny Meedon came. Laura had convinced herself that Mrs. Maunder had properly arranged every thing for her departure; and this promised interview was now the only circumstance she looked forward to, ere she quitted this unharmonized society. At eight then she entered the little breakfast-room, and found Miss Meedon already there, who observed with silent concern, her unrefreshed looks.

They now arranged a plan for their future correspondence; and that it might be at once confidential and secure, it was settled that Laura should deposit her letters at a place pointed out by Miss Meedon, which was the residence of a woman sufficiently attached to her, she said, to oblige her by a compliance with such a request, and keep the secret: and through the same channel Laura was to seek her replies.

Again Fanny cautioned her against the machi-

machinations of Lady Melville, and entreated her to impart any circumstance strange and apparently mysterious, in which she was connected.

"And now," continued Miss Meedon, "I must apprize you of a suspicion I cannot forbear entertaining, that those letters you told me you had written to your Adwan friends, were never delivered to the post; because I have particularly enquired into the affair, and I find that your woman was induced to give them to James, the boy, who from negligence, or a worse motive, may perhaps have transferred the charge to another, or not thought of executing it at all. I have questioned him several times upon the subject; but he protests he carried them himself to the office the same hour he received them, whilst Susan, with whom he has quarrelled, assures me she saw the letters Mrs. Maunder had given to him, the next day in the place where he sleeps.

"Oh Heaven! what will Mrs. Aubrey imagine, from a silence so apparently ungrateful!" exclaimed Laura: then

recollecting that if this were indeed the case, she might justify herself, and yet hope that the friendship of Mrs. Aubrey was not forfeited, the intimation soothed, rather than distressed her.

Having repeatedly thanked Miss Meedon for the many marks of attention and regard she had received from her, Laura conjured her not to suffer their separation to diminish her attachment.—"I have so few friends," added she mournfully, "that the loss of any one which my relenting genius may present, is a cruel blow to me! Do not then, my dear Miss Meedon, forget me; but if my insignificance or inexperience should operate to my disadvantage, allow the amiable compassion you possess, to plead for me."

"It is impossible I can forget, or cease to feel interested for you," replied Fanny: "I wish I could be of any material service, my dear Miss Delaunie; but, fettered and enslaved as I am, I can only caution and advise you: and perhaps at this moment, you think my zeal too unconfined and impertinent. Yet the character of Lady

Lady Melville has been so much discussed, and so severely arraigned in the conduct of her daughters, (pardon me that I speak thus unreservedly of any of your connections), that I feared the influence she might obtain over you, from her years and pretended attachment, might be exerted to your detriment."

"You have made me tremble," returned Laura; "but I hope your kind anxiety will be a preservative. I will inform you of all that occurs to me. Perhaps the prompt return of Lord John Traherne, or his interference in my behalf, may soon relieve me from a situation I dread to enter into. The advice of Mrs. Hamilton too, when she revisits London, I shall hope to receive the benefit of; and I may, I trust, again interest the benevolent Aubreys.——Oh, I must hope all this, or I know not what would become of me!"

Miss Meedon encouraged her to do so; and having affectionately bade each other adieu, Laura returned to her apartment, to await the levee of Mrs. Meedon, and her own approaching departure.

At half after ten, the carriage of Lady Melville was announced to her by Dolly; but as the lady of the mansion was yet invisible, Laura ventured to detain it until she could personally apprize her that she was leaving the house, as well as to exchange the civility of a parting compliment. *En attendant* she desired the *suivante* of Lady Mary Mornay to conduct her to her Lady, who, sheltered from detection by the closed shutters, called for her handkerchief, and affected to weep their separation; consoling herself and Laura, however, with reiterated declarations of unalterable attachment, and a very frequent intercourse at the house of Lady Melville, who was, she asserted, the most decent and civilized old woman she had ever encountered.—"As for this good-for-nothing old Meedon fright," added Lady Mary, wiping away her tears, "I shall make a principle of ruining her, in return for her insolence and impertinence! For really if one did not take the trouble of giving these landlady gentlewomen a lesson now-and-then, it would be impos-

sible to exist under their nasty, stupid, antiquated roofs!"

Laura conjured her not to suffer her resentment to transport her so far: and after many earnest entreaties, at length obtained that the culprit should not be so rigorously punished.

At this part of the conference, Dolly brought intelligence that Mrs. Meedon was waiting to see her young Lady; and Laura returning the tender adieus of Lady Mary, obeyed the summons.

Mrs. Meedon wore a much more placid aspect than at their late interview; and professed that she was infinitely obliged to Miss Delaunie for taking her *hint* so readily, and she hoped they parted good friends.

Laura bowed, but could not prevail with herself to assent verbally.

"For my part," proceeded the old lady, "I am sure I have no animosity at all against you; and I declare I should not have objected to your staying with me, but really, Miss Delaunie, my situation, as you may suppose, is so unplea-

sant, and I have so many tempers to conciliate——"

"I beg, Madam," interrupted Laura, "that you will not think it necessary to enter into any further explanation: I merely wished to see you before I quitted your house, to take my leave, and to enquire how far my residence here has rendered me your debtor, that I may represent the circumstance to my friends, and procure your demand to be settled."

Mrs. Meedon protested she could not think of making any charge for so inconsiderable a time, especially as Miss Delaunie quitted her so obligingly on so short a notice; and if her house had been any accommodation for the few days Miss Delaunie had inhabited it, she was very much gratified. She then resumed her expressions of sorrow at the necessity of the separation, and Laura, distressed and disgusted, at length left her; and accompanied by her woman, was taken to her new residence, where she found Lady Melville in her dressing-room, writing at an enormous *secretaire*, surrounded by papers and

and parchments. She raised her head at the entrance of her young guest, and extending her hand with a courteous mien, welcomed her very complacently.

Laura apologized for having detained the carriage; and mentioning that she had been induced to do so, that she might not leave the house of Mrs. Meedon without seeing her—

"You were right," returned Lady Melville: "notwithstanding the woman was undeserving of such an attention, yet it is always politic to leave upon the minds of people with whom one has associated, a good impression. We may be benefited by so doing in various inconceivable ways, and I commend your caution."

Laura received this unexpected plaudit with some confusion; for in the sense conceived by Lady Melville, she had not deserved it: but her hesitation was not observed, for the lady putting up some of her papers, almost immediately rose to conduct her to the apartment destined for her, that she might—so the Countess expressed herself—feel entirely at home.

With smothered sighs, and an aspect of half-repressed sadness, Laura followed; and was installed in the possession of the bed-chamber and dressing-room lately occupied by Lady Madalina.

"I leave you at present," said Lady Melville, "to establish yourself comfortably; with an injunction that you consider yourself to be in the habitation of a friend and parent. In the evening I shall introduce you to a select party, but at dinner we shall be *tête-à-tête.*"

With this hint she withdrew; yet returned, however, to inform Laura that her time until five o'clock would this day, and indeed very generally, be at her disposal.

At her departure, Laura gazed round her with a momentary incredulity.

"Can it be?" thought she: "has my adverse destiny indeed cast me into the protection of Lady Melville!"

As she secretly uttered this exclamation, her attention was arrested by a half-length print representing the Marchioness of Bellingham, smiling in all the soft gaiety

gaiety of complacent youth—in the bloom of life, and the zenith of beauty. On one side of the image hung the portrait of Lady Ronald, and on the other that of their friend Lady Harriet Clinton, which, by some strange neglect, or unfeeling thoughtlessness, had been suffered to retain its station.

CHAP. VII.

LAURA had remained some moments gazing with very painful sensations, at this group, now so ill associated, when Dolly interrupted her reverie by entering to announce that the baggage was arrived.

"Whither," thought Laura, "will it be removed to next?"

Whilst Mrs. Maunder was arranging it, she sat down to write to her Adwan

friends; for the suspicions of Fanny Meedon, which she almost hoped were just, had determined her to enquire if they had received her former letters, at the same time that she obtained the opportunity she wished for, of informing Mrs. Aubrey of her change of abode, and the necessity that had compelled her to it. But she had scarcely traced ten lines, when an intimation reached her that Lady Melville requested her presence in the drawing-room: and chagrined though she was at the interruption, she hastened to obey the summons.

Her alacrity was, however, considerably checked, when on advancing to the door opened to her by the servant, she beheld Lord Glendarvon seated with an air of great satisfaction, by the side of the equally complacent Lady Melville, who, with her most insinuating mien, gently reproached Laura for not informing her of her late alarming indisposition.—"My dear love," added her Ladyship, "I will send instantly for Doctor ———: you still appear pale and languid!"

Laura

Laura coldly returning the silent salutation of the noble visitor, assured her that she was perfectly recovered, and did not require any prescription.

That declaration, Lord Glendarvon said, relieved him from an anxiety that had haunted him the whole of the past night. He added, that it had urged him to the house of Mrs. Meedon; from whence his daughter had directed him to that of Lady Melville, upon whose amiable indulgence he had thus early intruded, in the hope of receiving consolatory intelligence himself, and carrying it to Mrs. Bergarde.

Laura again bowed with a frigid aspect; but Lady Melville acknowledged, with an apparent warmth of gratitude, the condescending attentions of his family to her beloved young friend. She then proceeded in a high panegyric strain to enumerate the amiable qualities of Lady Mary Mornay; and Lord Glendarvon protested she was equally enamoured of the attractive excellencies of her Ladyship. After a very fluent eulogium on either side, the Earl undertook, on the part of his duteous

child, to wave every ceremonious preliminary, and prevail with her to enliven her lovely friend Miss Delaunie, with her society throughout the day; and further promised to call in himself, in the evening.

Lady Melville was charmed with this little arrangement, because it was her earnest wish, she said, to reconcile her young inmate to the habitation of an old woman so little inclined to gaiety as herself.

"I am much honoured by so condescending a solicitude," said Laura, who perceived she was now expected to take a part in this complimentary dialogue, "and certainly the society of Lady Mary Mornay is equally flattering to me: but were the habitation of your Ladyship in a desert, to me in the presence instance it ought to be grateful."

"You are a good and amiable girl!" exclaimed Lady Melville; "but I must not immure you as if I had forgotten my own youthful dispositions. No, my dear Laura, in my house you are at liberty to receive your friends; nor shall I repine if

if their distinguishing partiality deprive me at intervals of your presence."

Laura, secretly disgusted by this very detailed fondness and display of liberality, and chagrined at the success of Lord Glendarvon's advances, could not so far conquer her sensations, as to support the farce any further; and her kind patroness easily discerning a part of her emotions, very dexterously introduced an indifferent topic, and prevented a flat and deadening pause in so fine a flow of sentiment.

In the succeeding conversation, in which Laura only bore a forced part, Lord Glendarvon happened to extol the exhibited portrait of a celebrated character; and Lady Melville enquiring if she had seen it, and receiving a negative answer, instantly ordered her carriage at half past three; for at that hour it was asserted, the declining rays of the western sun rendered the spectacle particularly interesting on a clear day.

This point arranged, Lord Glendarvon, anxious to execute his part of the recent treaty, now disappeared, to communicate to

to his daughter the engagement he had formed for her, intending to obtain her assent by an argument that scarcely ever failed.

Lady Melville at this moment exhibited a much greater portion of animation than Laura had observed in her aspect at their previous meeting: but at the departure of her visitor, her Ladyship did not suffer any observation to escape her, of the probable result of this preliminary interview, because her discernment, which had already been very busy, enjoined a discretion she thought necessary for the present.

Laura was again returning to her apartment, to conclude her interrupted task, when Lady Ronald was announced, who seizing her hand at her entrance, declared in a tone of careless unconcern, that she was delighted to meet her: then addressing her mother, enquired with the same *nonchalance*, what was the news?

Lady Melville sighed, and shook her head.

"Oh, for the sake of Heaven, none of those sombre looks!" resumed she: "I cannot

cannot be in a more unfortunate situation, thanks to my unkind stars, than I now find myself in!"

"Laura, my love," interrupted the more prudent parent, "you were writing letters, I believe, when my request was intruded upon you."

"She shall not leave us," said Lady Ronald, still detaining her hand; "a face one has not seen for some time, is quite reviving: I am fatigued to death with the same figures and objects from day to day."

Lady Melville again sighed, but her daughter did not, or would not observe it; and after pouring upon Laura a multitude of questions merely to pass the time, suddenly exclaimed—

"Do you know, Ma'am, that Sandby and Madalina have had a very serious *fracas*—they talk of a separation."

"Imprudent girl!" exclaimed Lady Melville.—"Alas, who would be a mother! When did this happen?"

"Last evening: but I think Madalina perfectly correct in her idea! Sandby, who

who is you know, facility itself, chose to be duped by an impertinent she had employed, and paid him on her account some money; and now he wishes to reimburse himself out of her appointment, because he asserts that the man made up such a lamentable story, that he could not refuse; so under this imagination, he is to dictate to her the disposal of her pin-money!"

Lady Melville made some further enquiry, and then regarding the hour—

"It is nearly three," observed she: "I could wish——"

"Do not, I entreat," interrupted Laura, "suffer any consideration for my mere amusement, to prevent your Ladyship from altering the disposition of your time this morning."

"My sweet girl," returned Lady Melville, "I confess I wish to see Madalina and her husband immediately. Lady Ronald will, however, if she has not any particular engagement, I am sure conduct you——"

"*Oui*

"*Oui surement*," cried Lady Ronald: "whither am I to conduct her?"

The sage parent explained; and particularly desiring her not to forget the precise time—

"Then I must fly immediately," said the daughter; "for I must of necessity call this morning at Doncastre's—so adieu, Ma'am!—*Allons*, my little Laura, *partons!*"

Laura would willingly have been excused from this tour with so flighty a *chaperon;* and earnestly entreated that she might not be the occasion of thus hurrying her Ladyship either to or from Mrs. Doncastre's.

"*Vas, tu es une petite sotte!*" exclaimed Lady Ronald, and pushing her towards the door, scarcely allowed her time to throw over her a proper equitment, ere she hurried her to the carriage, and they were driven with great velocity to the elegant house of the elegant Madame Doncastre. The servant who opened the door, instantly ran to the foot of the stairs, and dispatched a messenger for Miss Augusta

Augusta Mowbray; whilst her Ladyship, without being at the trouble of giving any order upon the subject, walked into an apartment upon the ground-floor.

The name had struck the ear of Laura as being familiar to her; and when Miss Augusta entered, she recognised in her one of her early playfellows at the mansion of Lady Bellingham. The girl appeared likewise to remember her, and bowed with a smiling air of recognition.

"*Oh mon Dieu!* I entirely forgot that you and Mowbray were friends!" exclaimed Lady Ronald: "she is, you know, one of my mother's numerous god-daughters; and you may observe that she is become a very handsome girl, and I assure you is the first *élégante* of the Doncastre establishment!"

To this unreserved commendation, the fair milliner, with a meek and modest air, bent in acknowledgment; and with her uncovered arms hanging on either side her slender figure, her eyes cast to the ground, and her face gently inclined, she awaited

awaited the commands of Lady Ronald, who continued, after a momentary pause—

"But, Augusta, I cannot now suffer you to listen to any further *douceur* from my willing lips; for I have a little commission for you—fly and muffle yourself up, whilst I write a line, which you must take this minute."

Miss Augusta vanished at this intimation, whilst Lady Ronald, seating herself at a very convenient *secretaire* that lay opened upon a large pier table, wrote a billet, desiring Laura at the same time to light the taper, and select amidst the seals, for the inscription, R. to A.

In complying with this request, Laura felt anxious and uneasy: the information given to Dolly at Adwan respecting Lady Ronald, struck upon her recollection, and a suspicion, as confirmed as painful, seized her, that this mysterious commission so readily and without comment undertaken by the pretty god-daughter of Lady Melville, thus judiciously applauded for becoming the first *élégante* of a milliner's very

very superb establishment, must be of a nature to make enquiry blush.

Ere the billet was concluded, Miss Augusta returned, *muffled* indeed, according to the instruction she had received; but still with an air of such superior pretensions, that her figure thus *travestic*, must of necessity excite unusual observation. Yet this reflection did not occur to Lady Ronald, who gave her the writing sealed up, but without any address; and Miss Mowbray receiving it in silence, with a smiling air withdrew.

Lady Ronald then expatiated in very warm terms upon her obliging disposition and extreme intelligence.—"Is she not a very charming girl?" added she: "she is really very handsome, and has an air of fashion."

Laura coldly assented.

"Do not look so grave," resumed the panegyrist; "I was not forming any comparison. Is it possible you could fancy I meant to commend her but for what she is? You must, however, acknowledge she is a good copy, and certainly a very attractive

attractive girl:—I am surprised she is not in very high keeping! Will you accompany me up stairs?"

Laura followed in silence; and after her Ladyship had examined a very extensive display of fashionable adornments, they again descended, and the fair messenger almost immediately rejoined them.

"Did you," asked Lady Ronald, hastily, "did you see———" Then casting a sudden glance at Laura, she checked herself: but her broken interrogation was comprehended; for Miss Augusta smiled and bowed, enquiring in a soft voice if her Ladyship had then sufficient time to walk up stairs.

"I have already done so," replied Lady Ronald. "Adieu, Augusta!——Come, my gentle Laura!" and with a quickened pace, she darted into her carriage, which she directed to the purposed place. But in flying up Piccadilly, it was stopped by Lord Melville, who, regarding Laura with silent surprise and displeasure, demanded with a very significant air, whither his sister was hurrying; when to the astonishment

ment of her unexperienced companion, she replied she meant to take a turn in the Park.

"I would advise you," resumed he, rather sternly, "not to quit the carriage: the gardens are damp, and may be dangerous. I should imagine you took cold yesterday."

Lady Ronald coloured: but with the same careless mien said, that she was infinitely obliged to him for his counsel. When Lord Melville rode off, she turned to Laura, and exclaimed with some vehemence against the impertinence of *soi-disant* friends.—"To be detained," added she, "by any thing when one is dying with impatience, is certainly delightful; but to be detained by an insolent, insinuated lecture is the *comble* of felicity!"

At length they reached the place of exhibition; and Lady Ronald, who had previously ordered her carriage to Brompton, to take up poor Mrs. Stanhope, and *give her an airing*, now quitted it in great haste, and seizing the arm of Laura, was running forward, when a man respectfully

checked

checked her speed, by requiring the admission money.

"I have not any money!" returned her Ladyship. "Laura, have you any?"

Laura produced her purse, and answering the demand for herself and her companion, they then proceeded: but Lady Ronald now quitted her arm, and advanced before her, whilst Laura was so much embarrassed by the entire darkness of the place she was directed to explore, that she was some little time ere she succeeded in attaining the picture: but the reflected light now dazzled her sight, and she could not even discern in the place her fair *chaperon*, though on distinguishing whispered accents near her, she turned in some alarm to observe who were her unseen neighbours. Yet this she could not immediately do; but as the whispering still continued in the most obscure corner of the place, she strained her sight to discern from whom it proceeded, when a laugh saluted her ear, and Lady Ronald came forward, attended by Mr. Averne!

Alarmed, shocked, and disgusted, Laura scarcely

scarcely credited her senses; whilst her incorrigible and depraved companion told her that, as she knew Averne admired her very much, she would not express any regret at their unexpected meeting.

The gentleman, with his usual insinuation, followed this overture with a most flattering and persuasive address, which Laura interrupted by suddenly exclaiming—

"For God's sake, let us go!"

"It is impossible," said Lady Ronald, rather more gravely; "I have sent away my carriage, and it will be half an hour at least, before it returns. Come now, my little Laura, do not be so *sauvage!* I am sure you are glad to see Averne, though you play off the indignant thus upon us!"

"Can it be indeed thus?" ejaculated Laura—"do I hear right? Can you, Lady Ronald——"

A figure advancing from the entrance, checked her expostulation, and she beheld Lord Glendarvon; at sight of whom Averne retired from the light, and Lady Ronald following him, they again spoke in a whisper, whilst his Lordship came forward,

forward, and discerning Laura, congratulated himself that he was not a second time disappointed. He proceeded to complain that she had exceeded the hour appointed very considerably, and that he had already been there, in the hope of meeting her. Then suddenly recollecting himself, he asked for the Dowager Lady Melville.

But Laura heard him not; for her every faculty was absorbed in attention to the motions of Lady Ronald.

"Good God!" thought she, "will she yet detain him, to be observed by this man! What will he conclude, and what will the world surmise at a conduct so depraved and unsisterly!"

Averne glided away at the moment when Lord Glendarvon remarking the unvaried direction of her eyes, followed them with an enquiring glance: and Lady Ronald instantly advancing towards the light, with her glass applied, protested that the effect of the piece was superb.

"But I have discovered a secret in my momentary seclusion," added she, gaily:

" this was a premeditated *rencontre*, it seems, my fair Laura! Upon my word your Lordship is very indiscreet to publish your good fortune with so little circumspection!"

Laura entirely overcome by her extreme assuredness, was speechless; and Lord Glendarvon, far from explaining with whom the appointment had been *tacitly* made, rather confirmed the idea Lady Ronald affected to have adopted, and replied to her raillery with a levity equal to her own; until the re-appearance of Mr. Averne rather disconcerted the lady, who seemed to regard him with real inquietude, whilst the intruder with a feigned ignorance of the manner in which the place was occupied, earnestly gazed at the representation it was to be imagined he came to see. As his return had not been preconcerted with Lady Ronald, she exclaimed in an agitation only half assumed—

" This is not to be tolerated! My Lord, may I request you to enquire if my carriage is at the door?"

Lord Glendarvon, who was very little the dupe of this finesse, obsequiously complied: and then without regarding the presence of Laura, Lady Ronald hastily demanded the reason why he had thus acted.

"I could not get off without being seen by that eternal scoundrel," replied he: "I am certain he is a scout!"

"Pshaw!" ejaculated her Ladyship; "you are foolishly apprehensive: remember my request, however!"

To this injunction he assented; and Lord Glendarvon now returning, he retired to some distance. Lady Ronald on learning that her people were not in attendance, expressed much impatience at their delay, and accused *poor* Mrs. Stanhope of detaining them repeatedly.

At this moment Mr. Averne turned suddenly, and fixing his eyes upon Laura, exclaimed—

"Miss Delaunie, and in town! How long have you been one of its inhabitants?"

Laura, extremely exasperated at such duplicity, and at the insolent security with

which they both appeared to brave her knowledge of their infamy, replied in an accent of disgust—

"To you, Sir, it is of little import; but my residence in London will not be so to me, if it again subject me to the indignity of such a scene!"

"Mr. Averne," rejoined her *chaperon*, "I more than partake the emotion of Miss Delaunie, and I request that we are not further insulted by your address!"

To this hint the gentleman bowed with a submissive air, and immediately withdrew. Again Lady Ronald now impatiently enquired for her carriage; and finding that it was at length returned, she was conducted to it by the sympathizing Lord Glendarvon, who, in reply to her complaints, expressed extreme astonishment at the *fortitude* of the offender, in presuming to remain an instant in her presence.

Not more than a dozen paces from the door, stood the subject of their conference, talking to three or four young men of apparent fashion, who seemed much amused

amused by some history he was giving them; and when Lord Glendarvon assisted Laura into the carriage, the whole party regarded her with a sneering grin, and walking forward a few steps, endeavoured to obtain a better view of her face, whilst Mr. Averne turned the contrary way with a parting glance at the confused Laura, which appeared to her both triumphant and malicious: but the attention of Lord Glendarvon was fortunately too well occupied to observe what passed, and when she lost sight of her scrutinizers, she endeavoured to forget their impertinence.

Lady Ronald now snatched the hand of Laura; and leaning her face upon her shoulder, began to weep with violence.

"Oh my sweet friend!" she exclaimed, "my life is in your hands! I confess to you all you may have reason to suspect; but if you betray my confidence, I will kill myself! I swear by all I respect and love, that I will—and my blood shall be upon your head!"

Laura, alarmed and disgusted by her vehemence, and the unwomanly threat

she uttered, entreated her to compose herself; but whilst every muscle of her countenance quivered with emotion, she repeated the asseveration, and called upon the Creator of heaven and earth to witness her oath!

"Recall your recollection, Madam," said Laura, with a sensation of disdain she could not repress: "no one will question *me* upon the dark subject to which you allude, and uninterrogated, how could I endure to mention it!"

"You engage then," returned Lady Ronald, eagerly, "that you will not discover what you may have seen and heard this day?"

"I shall not voluntarily discover it," replied Laura.

"That promise will not suffice," observed her Ladyship; "you must give it me unconditionally and unboundedly."

And stopping the carriage, she endeavoured to assume a placid air, and directed her servants to Mrs. Doncastre's.

"Lady Melville will, I fear, retard her dinner,"

dinner," said Laura, "in expectation of my return."

"It is not much past five," replied her companion; "you will be in time."

A silence ensued, and in a few seconds they were again at the arch temple of frivolity, and Lady Ronald motioned to Laura to enter the house, who declared her intention of awaiting her return in the carriage.

"You must oblige me, my dear friend, "by altering your plan," said the *chaperon:* "I particularly wish it."

Thus urged in the presence of the servants, Laura reluctantly complied; they were conducted to the same apartment, and Miss Augusta Mowbray summoned as before, who appeared with a mien of enquiry and alarm.

"Bring me," said Lady Ronald, "some of your most elegant turbans and caps; and that robe I saw in the front drawing-room."

Miss Augusta casting at her former playfellow a look of distrust, withdrew; and her patroness then throwing herself

upon her knees before the distressed Laura, again conjured her to have mercy, and calm her distraction by an unequivocal promise of concealing her intercourse with Averne.

"I entreat that your Ladyship will quit that position," exclaimed Laura, "and rest satisfied with the assurance I have already given, for no other can pass my lips."

Lady Ronald rising, clasped her round the neck, which she wetted with her tears, and called upon her to recollect their long acquaintance with each other, and the many instances she had received of her good-will: and Laura, spite of her dissenting judgment and abhorring principles, felt rather softened, when Miss Mowbray returned, laden with the described finery; and Lady Ronald thus continued:—

"You shall oblige me, my kind Laura; you cannot, must not refuse my urgent petition! and as a sample of my future gratitude, chuse of these trifles any you prefer, or accept them all!"

"This

"This robe will exactly suit Miss Delaunie's beautiful shape," said the pretty Augusta, in a persuasive tone.

"Lady Ronald," exclaimed Laura, in a trembling voice, "you have judged me much amiss! I might have been seduced by your distress to act against my own idea of right, but your presents I despise. Do not further irritate my pride, and insult my rectitude, by urging so vile a compensation for the falsehood to which you would impel me! Yet I again assure you that if I am not questioned upon the subject, the transactions of this morning will not be revived by me; and with this concession your Ladyship ought to be satisfied."

Lady Ronald, however, still supplicated and conjured her; but Laura firmly repulsed her tears and entreaties: and at length, a time-piece in the room striking six, reminded her Ladyship that she had exceeded the dinner hour of her mother; and very reluctantly she abandoned for the moment any further effort, and condescended to reconduct her obstinate

charge to the house of Lady Melville, where she bade her adieu by the appellation of her dearest and best friend, and kissing the hand of Laura as they parted, left her to account as she thought proper for her long absence.

CHAP. VIII.

LADY Melville readily discerned that she was both agitated and dispirited; yet she forbore to enquire into the reason of her protracted stay, but observed to Lady Mary Mornay, who, in profound obedience to her dear papa, had been with her some time, that she had done wrong to entrust Laura, so immediately after her indisposition, to so giddy a creature as Lady Ronald, "who has, I perceive," con-

concluded her Ladyship, "fagged her most unmercifully."

"My dear Laura," said Lady Mary, taking her hand tenderly, "looks quite ill!"

"I have only a trifling cold," she replied, "which renders me stupid."

Dinner was now announced, and Laura was obliged to descend to it without changing her dress—a ceremony she quitted the dessert to perform: but when she reached her apartment, her head was so heavy and painful, that she was compelled to rest it a considerable time before she could prevail upon herself to ring for Dolly, who was alarmed at her feverish looks, and insisted that she was more fit to go to bed, than to go down stairs again.

"I am indeed ill!" replied Laura, holding her aching temples.

"Lauk, Ma'am, lay down a bit," said Dolly: "you'll soon be dressed when you sets about it, if you gets better: and if you don't, why the drawing-room an't no place for you! though I must say, the

folks here is quiet enough, considering they be people of considerablation!"

"I believe I must lay down for a few minutes," said Laura, in a faint voice: and Mrs. Maunder instantly gave up any further observation she might otherwise have made, to assist her.

In half an hour Lady Melville tapped at the door; and being admitted with cautious silence by Dolly, walked gently to the bedside, and beheld her young inmate in an unquiet, but heavy slumber, with hectic cheeks, and an agitated respiration.

Alarmed at these symptoms, she sent for an aged practitioner of physic, by whom she was always herself attended. His name was Weicherback, and he was a German, living in a little court in the city, and acting at once as physician, surgeon, apothecary, *accoucheur*, and tooth-drawer.

Until this many-professioned gentleman arrived, Lady Melville ordered that Laura should not be disturbed; and she then rejoined Lady Mary Mornay, who almost procured

procured herself an hysteric fit by the extreme concern she thought proper to exhibit. When Dr. Weicherback arrived, his patroness the Countess of Melville, accompanied him to the apartment of the patient, who was now awake, and had heard of the movements making for her benefit.

"What do you think of this dear child's indisposition?" asked Lady Melville eagerly, and presenting the hand of Laura.

"I sholl luke at her preshenly," replied the Doctor, seating himself, and taking from his legs a very muddy pair of spatterdashes, which he held towards Mrs. Maunder, that she might receive them from his hands. "Heere maw-ee deere," pursued he, "do you tay-eeke deeshe, and draw ee dem by de kishen faw-eere—heere, tak-ole! and moin you draw-ee dem vel!"

But Mrs. Dolly, in extreme indignation, kept aloof.

"Vat ish de matter vid de silly vench —why done you tak-ole?"

Lady

Lady Melville, less scrupulous, adjusted the matter by taking the spatterdashes, dirty as they were, and delivering them to Mrs. Maunder, who could no longer presume to deliberate; and the Countess repeating the charge that they might be well dried, again enquired what the Doctor thought of her young friend.

"Oh I muss examen vat de mattere ish," replied he: "come, my pretty shile, look at mee—strech out your han! Oh tish a leetil fevre—we shoon gedt ridt of dat! Dare—go, my shile—ress your ade upon your peela; it ake a leetil bit I shpose!"

Laura glad to be dismissed, retired to the next room, and according to the immediate prescription of her uncouth physician, again laid her head upon the pillow, from which she was in about two hours disturbed by Lady Melville, who gave her, herself, the draught sent by Dr. Weicherback, and brought a report of very doleful lamentations uttered by Lord Glendarvon and his fair daughter,

upon

upon the cruel occasion that deprived them of her society.

Laura, delighted that she was not compelled to listen to them in detail, now received the farewell compliment of the night from her attentive patroness; and found herself the next morning so well recovered, that she rose to attend her *déjeuné*.

Lady Melville expressed great satisfacfaction to see her thus convalescent; and when the breakfast was concluded, she told Laura that she could now leave her without much inquietude.—"For I am compelled," added she with a sigh, "to renew my visit this morning to my daughter Madalina. Dr. Weicherback will be here shortly, and perhaps, my dear Laura, his singularities may rather amuse you for half an hour: but however strange they may appear, I can affirm with truth and from experience, that he possesses more judgment and skill than many of his profession who use a carriage instead of spatterdashes, and who speak very pure and refined English. Yet he is one of those mortals,

mortals, who from the uncouth peculiarities of his manner and habits, can never advance themselves in the estimation of the world, whilst mankind will be governed by prejudice and appearance."

Laura, who had been compelled to listen to the indignant comments of Dolly, upon the oddness of the Countess in always having such beggarly folks to do with, could not avoid smiling at the recollection of the evening scene; and Lady Melville, pleased to find her capable of this advance towards vivacity, shortly after left her to perform her engagement.

Laura, still very languid, retired to her dressing-room, where she resumed her half-written letter to Mrs. Aubrey, hoping to have now a sufficient opportunity to complete it; and also to dispatch a billet to the good-humoured Fanny Meedon. But her intention was again frustrated by intelligence that Mr. Biranly was below, waiting to see her.

"The Captain says, Ma'am," added Dolly, all in a flutter, "that he is only come from the country this morning!"

"From

"From Adwan!" asked Laura, eagerly.

"Yes, Ma'am, I suppose so," replied Dolly.

Full of the hope of hearing immediately from her friends, or at least of learning something of them, Laura hastily descended, without casting a thought upon the singular celerity of Biranly in discovering her residence at the house of Lady Melville. He started back when she appeared, exclaiming—

"You are ill, Miss Delaunie! Good God, you must be very ill!"

"I am better considerably," she replied. "Tell me, Sir, how you left the amiable family at Adwan?"

"Have you not been seriously ill?" repeated he.

"No indeed! Did you see Mrs. Aubrey yesterday?—Did she send me any remembrance by you?"

"I had not an opportunity of riding over to Adwan," he replied, "since poor Rothemere left it."

Laura had not at the moment recollected the circumstance of his removal, as related

related to her by Dolly: and her countenance fell at this intimation; whilst the mention of Captain Rothemere reminded her too that she ought to enquire for him and the friendly Hamiltons, and she endeavoured to repair the neglect.

Biranly then informed her that the invalid had not only removed too soon, that he might be in the vicinity of his brother officers, and be relieved from the solitude of a sick chamber, but had likewise irritated and inflamed his blood by intemperance, which had produced a raging fever, from which he was now slowly recovering. "When his situation was pronounced to be dangerous," continued he, "I dispatched an express to Mrs. Hamilton, because I was endeavouring to obtain leave of absence, and I could not decently leave him wholly to the care of mercenaries."

"And could not Mrs. Hamilton," asked Laura, "find a moment to bestow on me? Have you not a line from her either?"

"I very much urged her," replied Biranly, "to give me so desirable a credential;

credential; but she was inexorable, and preferred post-office expedition."

At this moment a domestic entered to inform Laura that Dr. Weicherback wished to see her; and well pleased with any pretext to terminate the interview with Biranly, now she discovered that he could not give her any intelligence of Mrs. Aubrey or Caroline St. Orme, she heard the summons with satisfaction.

"I was assured that you must be very ill," exclaimed he, when the servant had withdrawn, "or you could not be thus altered! You are attended by a physician?"

Laura again asserted that her complaint was a mere cold, accompanied by a slight degree of fever; and hinting that she must not presume to suffer the Doctor to wait, Biranly reluctantly rose to depart. Ere he bade her adieu, however, he made an effort to renew the conference when her physician should have quitted her; but Laura believing that the result of it would not be satisfactory to either, intimated that she was writing letters, from which his

his visit had interrupted her, and he gave up the point. But this mention of her previous employment appeared to awaken a sudden recollection in the mind of Biranly, who produced a very dirty-looking epistle in her address, and with some hesitation informed her that it had been given to him the preceding day by the people of the inn where he had last had the honour of seeing her, some of whom had found it after her departure, within a mile or two of the house.

She instantly supposed it to be the lost letter from Mr. Aubrey; and almost snatching it from him, exclaimed—

"Why did they not forward it to Bellingham House?"

"I enquired why they had detained it so long," answered Biranly, in some confusion; "and they told me it was found by an inferior servant of the inn, who had waited until he could meet with an opportunity of taking it himself to Adwan, in the hope of a reward."

"What ish de raison," ejaculated Dr.

Dr. Weicherback, bursting into the room, "dat you keep me vaaiting, vaaiting in dish mannre? Oh ho, I shee you recovre very fash, my pretty shile!"

Biranly regarded the physician with an air of astonishment and displeasure.

"Well, Shere," resumed he, "make your farewelsh to dish yong laidie. Here, my shile, I av brote you draaf in my pocket—sho taike it direclee."

Biranly, not in the least reconciled to the good Doctor by this novel and undignified method of proceeding, was now however compelled to depart; for the German nodded towards the door, and informed him that he awaited his exit: whilst Laura earnestly wishing to learn the contents of her recovered letter, wished them both in the street.

When Dr. Weicherback withdrew, she eagerly opened it; and the first sentence that met her eye, informed her that Mr. Aubrey wrote at the instigation of Lord John, to assure her of the increasing interest his Lordship took in her welfare,

welfare, and to say that as his patron understood she was shortly to be removed to London, he particularly requested that she would not omit, when she performed the journey, to call at ———, the mansion-house of Lady Betty Traherne, which was not more than a mile out of the direct road; as her Ladyship very much desired to see her, and even now entertained favourable sentiments of her, upon the representation of her brother. Mr. Aubrey then proceeded to caution Laura against any renewal of intercourse with the Countess of Melville and her daughters, during her residence in London.—"I understand," he continued, "that the Dowager Lady Melville affects to speak of you with great interest and regard: but, my dear Miss Delaunie, the whole of that family are not only very unfit society for a young woman of unblemished reputation, but allow me also to intimate, from a perfect knowledge of the temper of Lord John, that any indication on your part of the slightest remnant of the partiality

partiality you may have formerly imbibed from habit and association, towards either of those ladies by whom his name and house have been so much injured, would be fatal to you in his esteem. To you they have been, not openly, but most insidiously adverse: avoid them then ——"

"I am undone!" exclaimed Laura, clasping the unfinished letter between her folded hands—"I have lost every friend the world afforded me!"

Her enfeebled spirits sunk under the agony of this supposition; and she was discovered by the servants, stretched on the ground, and wholly senseless. It was some time ere the remedies applied, restored her to sensation: she then complained of a violent pain and giddiness in her head, and to the urgent enquiries of Dolly, of what had been the matter, could not apparently reply.

Lady Melville was now sent to; but it was late in the day when she returned home, for she had quitted the house of Mr.

Mr. Sandby when the messenger reached it; and after much enquiry, no one could ascertain whither she had then gone: indeed it was only by the curiosity of some of her domestics it was discovered some time after, that having dismissed her carriage at the house of Mrs. Cruden, where it was to return for her in two hours, she had from thence taken a hack, and with *secret benevolence*, visited the King's Bench Prison, to alleviate the necessities of one of its inhabitants.

Lady Melville found her unfortunate young guest raving in the delirium of an alarming fever, in which the subject of her anxiety, and the occasion of the shock she had received, were at once betrayed. Her Ladyship listened attentively to her wild ejaculations; and having fully sated her curiosity, gave orders for the relief of the sufferer.

The letter so often recurred to by Laura, was discovered to be in the possession of Dolly, who in the height of her affliction, had not neglected the security of her young Lady's

Lady's secrets; and she very unwillingly gave up the fatal epistle to the inspection of Lady Melville, who, returning with it to her dressing-room, read it through several times with much reflective deliberation, and then deposited the scroll in her private cabinet.

The recovery of Laura was long doubtful; but at length with much attention and care, she appeared to be in a state of convalescence; and Dr. Weicherback and his coadjutor, for Lady Melville had called in another physician, both earnestly recommended for their young patient a change of air, the first moment she could with safety be removed a few miles from town.

The mind of Laura now reverted with extreme anxiety to the principal cause of her malady; and having eagerly caught at the first opportunity of interrogating Dolly upon those points which most alarmed her, discovered that Lady Melville was in complete possession of the sentiments of Mr. Aubrey, and must have fully divined the effect they had produced upon her.

This certainly shocked and tormented her; but the calm impenetrability of her Ladyship prevented the remotest allusion to the subject; and Laura felt herself too weak, and too much in her power to urge a discussion, the result of which at this moment could not assuredly be in her favour: yet she repined at the continued state of miserable duplicity in which they both existed—the one extending favours and kindness she must know to be unacceptable, and the other overwhelmed by a weight of obligation from a person with whom her most venerated friends had earnestly cautioned her to avoid the most trifling and casual intercourse.

Still, however, Lady Melville expressed for Laura the same affection and interest: but every demonstration of her good-will added to the inquietude of her hapless charge, and so much retarded her recovery, that it was feared her constitution would not be easily re-established.

In Dolly she sufficiently confided to dispatch her privately to the house of Lord John

John for intelligence; from whence she learned that he had left England with Mr. Aubrey. The faithful *suivante* had likewise been instructed to extend her peregrination to the house of Mrs. Hamilton, who had returned to town the evening before, but was unfortunately not at home at the moment Dolly called. Yet Laura was delighted to find that this worthy woman, upon whose friendship and integrity she could rely, was so near her; and with a trembling hand she scrawled a short billet, to entreat a charitable visit from her, hinting at the same time how much she required her advice and consolatory kindness.

Dolly was strictly charged to deliver this into the hand of Mrs. Hamilton only; and she was likewise to enquire at the place mentioned by Miss Meedon, if any letter lay there for her young Lady. But poor Mrs. Maunder was prevented from making this second expedition by the confidential servant of Lady Melville; who informed her that his Lady having

enquired for her in her former absence, and hearing that she had walked out, had given strict orders that Joseph should execute any commission both for Miss Delaunie and herself that might be requisite, that Mrs. Maunder might be the better enabled to give an uninterrupted attention to her young Lady.

"I don't want Joseph to execute none of my commissions, not I!" replied Dolly, "nor my young Lady's neither—for she had rather I should go myself, without trusting to any body! So let me come by, for I shall speak to her Ladyship, and tell her so, when I comes back."

"I must obey my Lady," retorted the man, still maintaining his ground, "and her Ladyship's orders are what I have said. So if I let you go, I may chance to lose my place; and I am sure you wouldn't wish to get me turned off, Mrs. Maunder, for that wouldn't be doing as you would be done by—and I'll be judged by any of my fellow-servants if I an't right!"

Dolly,

Dolly, who was not ambitious of attracting to herself the obloquy and scorn which her fidelity to her Lady, to the injury of a *fellow-servant*, would be certain of drawing upon her head, now reluctantly gave up the point; but she would not so easily give up her billet, which she conscientiously carried back to Laura, saying that Lady Melville had taken it into her whimsical head, that she was not to set foot out of doors; and she had done every thing but fight with Mr. Wilson to get away: but all would not do.

Laura was much chagrined at this intelligence; but she had no remedy against the decree, and was compelled to send her note much curtailed however, by the appointed servant, and await a better opportunity of hearing from Fanny Meedon.

In about an hour Mr. Joseph informed her that he had delivered the billet at the house of Mrs. Hamilton, who was from home, which was the reason he could not procure an answer. Laura was disappointed; but consoled herself with the hope of seeing her friend in a day or

two; though she could not help feeling a secret inquietude that Dolly had not been suffered to proceed on her mission. But she endeavoured to dismiss any lurking suspicion of the integrity of Lady Melville in this particular, which could not be just, unless her Ladyship had condescended to enter into a league with her domestics, so disgraceful, that Laura would not allow herself to imagine it possible.

The conduct of this inexplicable woman throughout her malady, extorted from her an involuntary and very contradictory sentiment to that with which her own recollections and the voice of the world had inspired her. In the paroxysms of the fever, and when far from being able to assist the efforts of others, the delirium of Laura rather defeated them, Lady Melville (so Mrs. Maunder had informed her) had never wholly quitted the apartment, and scarcely even left her bedside: and her solicitude and anxiety had been so extreme, that for five nights she had only reposed upon a couch half an hour successively;

successively; and since her young guest had recovered her perception, she had often with half-closed eyes, discerned a tear trickling from those of Lady Melville, as she stood gazing at her languid countenance.

"From what can such unfeigned emotion and such earnest attentions proceed," thought Laura, "but from real attachment? In this then she is at least sincere; and however unfortunate she has rendered me, I must cherish those sensations of gratitude I am so well convinced she merits!"

CHAP. IX.

TWO days after her application to Mrs. Hamilton, Dolly informed her that she had heard for certain that she had again left town: and as her inattention corroborated this intelligence, Laura was com-

pelled to believe it, and supposed the imprudence or endangered health of Mr. Rothemere still required her indefatigable attentions; but she was mortified and vexed that she had not found an hour to bestow upon her.

For the first time she now quitted her apartment; and Lady Melville received her in the drawing-room with a countenance of pleasure, and many tender congratulations. When these were uttered, she told the invalid that she was very assiduously enquiring for a place near town, in a good air, where she might retrieve her strength and her bloom with greater expedition.

"For me, Madam!" exclaimed Laura: "good Heavens! for me is your Ladyship incurring this trouble and expence?"

"For you, my love, and for myself likewise! For, Oh Laura! with a serene countenance I cover an almost broken heart! My imprudent children—and the cruel world! For what, great God! did I dedicate the incessant labours of my life! At a time when other women are still

still governed by selfish vanity, I abandoned the admiration I could then command, to devote myself to the education and advancement of my orphan girls; and because my declining years are cursed with the cruel certainty that all my painful efforts have been vain, the envenomed tongue of malice stings my already wounded soul by insinuations that kill me!"

Laura could not, unmoved, behold her streaming tears accompanying such a plaint, nor distinguish upon her yet fine aspect the mingled traces of years and anguish, without a generous emotion of tenderness and compassion.

"Should the world indeed wrong her," thought she—"should I, the subject of her bounty and her cares, add my portion, however secretly, to the injury—where is my atonement, and where the bounds of my ingratitude! But can the cool judgment of Mr. Aubrey mislead him so widely!—Yet his zeal for the honour and happiness of his friend and patron, Lord John, wounded by the stigma cast upon the Bellingham family, may perhaps

bias him. Mrs. Hamilton too is very cautious, and Miss Meedon is candid; yet they both condemn her: but still that may be, in consequence of the previous sentence of the world, apparently justified; and even that sentence surely is never passed without some foundation in truth and equity—yet that foundation may be laid on the errors of Lady Melville, not her guilt! But if it should be as many say—if she has wilfully perverted the minds of her daughters——Oh, no mother would do that!—it is impossible!—what could be the inducement to such dreadful depravity?——No, she must be wronged!—and she suffers from the failure of her efforts, because they might be ill-judged. But may she not also mislead me?—Ah, who will stretch out a hand to guide and assist me?"

Such for many days were the doubts and conflicts of Laura's mind; yet her health imperceptibly amended, and her strength visibly increased: the fears of the physicians gradually subsided, and they took their leave.

Lady

Lady Melville was however in treaty for an ornamented cottage, and had no wish to recede from her previous intention of taking it for the summer months.

Lord Glendarvon, who had been out of town a fortnight, now returned, and was charmed to find Laura in the drawing-room, on his first visit to Lady Melville. It was with extreme indignation that he learned, in reply to the enquiries he urged, that Lady Mary had been very remiss in her attentions: for in fact, this very tender friend had only once called at the door of the invalid during her long confinement; a circumstance, however, Lady Melville endeavoured not to dwell upon, but with her usual moderation rather excused it.

Yet Lord Glendarvon declared with vehemence that he would renounce his daughter if she did not immediately essay, by a more proper deportment, to obtain the forgiveness of the Countess and her lovely young friend.

Laura thought it now right to plead for the fair culprit, the honour of whose

notice she had so little pretension to urge, she said; nor could she hope or expect that upon *her* account at least, Lady Mary should have deprived herself of a more necessary or pleasing disposition of her time.

The incensed parent expressed so much admiration for the amiable gentleness and candour she displayed upon the subject, that to avoid any further animated comment upon herself and her virtues, Laura complained of weariness, and withdrew.

Lady Melville then mentioned her intention of taking her out of town, to accelerate the entire recovery of her health; and her noble visitor instantly reflecting on the proximate situation of his villa at the Thames side, for which he declared he had no immediate possible use, asserted that it would much benefit the place, and confer a justly estimated honour on himself, if her Ladyship would condescend to occupy it for the summer.

But Lady Melville would not listen to this proposal. If indeed Lord Glendarvon had any idea of *letting* the house,

she would relinquish the cottage she had in view, and become his tenant; but upon no other terms would she enter the premises.

His Lordship replied that upon any terms he should think any habitation he possessed, much dignified and embellished by her residence in it; and without any *precise* mention of conditions or rent, it was at length settled that Lady Melville should look at the place the next day.

Of this arrangement Laura heard not a syllable; but on the following morning, when breakfast was concluded, Lady Melville told her that she thought a gentle airing would be of service to them both, and requested her company a little way out of town, to assist in surveying a house she had some idea of taking.

As the day was uncommonly fine, and the atmosphere soft and mild, Laura could not form any plea to excuse herself; and at twelve they entered the carriage, to view the villa of Lord Glendarvon, which had been beautified by three or four successive proprietors, and had

had lately been sold to its present owner for a very considerable sum of money.

Laura did not recollect having recently travelled the same road, until she suddenly beheld a gate leading to Rodenwach House, which was too remarkable to escape her notice, though she had before seen it only by lamplight.

A gentleman on horseback, waiting to be admitted through it, turned to regard the carriage as it passed, and Laura recognised St. Orme, who bowed to her very coolly.

The long absent colour which had flown to her cheek, was not unobserved by Lady Melville, who equally discerned the tremor that accompanied it: but this strong emotion could not make any discovery to her; for the delirium of Laura, and her own watchful attention to every accent she then uttered, had unveiled to her assiduous Ladyship every movement of her soul. Upon this occasion she merely said in a careless tone—

"That is Mr. St. Orme, I believe."

"Yes, Madam," replied Laura: and a-

long.

long silence ensued, which was only broken by their arrival at their place of destination.

Laura was much surprised at the beauty of the spot, and the high state of cultivation and luxurious elegance of the grounds, a part of which they traversed to attain the house. It was finished and furnished in a style to correspond with the idea she had received from the outworks; and she could not avoid recurring with great inquietude to the uncommon expence Lady Melville was now plunging into, ostensibly at least, on her account.

"You look pale, my love," said her Ladyship: "these apartments have not been long enough opened to change the confined air. I think if you walk your own pace through the shrubbery to the water-side, the pure atmosphere will revive you; and in the interim I will look over the house."

"The lady will find seats to rest herself as she goes along," said a female domestic, who was exhibiting the mansion, "and it's pretty shady."

Laura

Laura gladly availed herself of this permission to enjoy the fragrance of a fine spring morning, in preference to the irksome task of surveying suites of rooms: and upon a trial of her strength, she found it so far exceed her expectations, that she walked almost half a mile without seeking to repose herself. The exhalations of the opening violet and the blossoming of early flowers, were soothing and reviving; yet painful sensations almost momentarily assailed her from more than one cause. The more lovely the landscape by which she was surrounded, the more blooming and cultivated the scene immediately beneath her eye, the more considerable, she reflected, must be the expenditure of Lady Melville, as the tenant of such a place; and if it were not entirely in compliment to her that her Ladyship removed to it, yet her illness and subsequent languor and debility had given rise to the plan of a *campagne* so near the metropolis.

Laura threw herself upon a bench that happened to be near her, and continued plunged in a deep reverie, until the sound of

of approaching steps induced her to look up, under the idea that Lady Melville had either sent, or was herself coming to recall her to the house. In this expectation, however, she was deceived; for instead of her patroness or a domestic, she again beheld St. Orme, who walked hastily towards the seat, to which the pale and motionless figure of Laura appeared to be affixed, and exclaimed in a tone that chilled her yet more—

"Miss Delaunie, what madness brings you here? When I saw the carriage turning into the lane that leads to this house, I would have disbelieved my senses; and I followed it to be convinced if the reports that have met my unwilling ear, could have any foundation! Still, when I perceived you seeking admission into this accursed place, I would have imagined it, if possible, a delusion! Where have you been for this fortnight past?"

To this abrupt demand Laura made not any reply; for her utterance was gone, and with fixed eyes, and a countenance of terror and dismay, she regarded her youthful

youthful monitor, who, after a pause, continued—

" Your appearance indeed accredits the tale of your late malady. Have you in reality been dangerously indisposed?"

" Dangerously!" repeated Laura, with a deep sigh, and reclining her head upon her hand; " I do not know—but I believe so: Lady Melville can inform you!"

" Lady Melville!" exclaimed St. Orme, in an accent that made her start; " it is to you I make the demand! Have you in truth been seriously ill? Your altered countenance and person tell me that you have, and that part of the hateful tale is at least a calumny! But why are you here? Why do you thus brave opinion?—I hear some one advancing this way—let me counsel you to think well upon the consequences of such a conduct—you are lost unless you recede quickly; and however you may err, you are too amiable in temper and disposition, to fall unregretted!"

The steps, which the gravel of the walk reverberated, now approached, and St. Orme

Orme vanished amidst the tall shrubs that surrounded the place.

"Where am I?" exclaimed Laura, suddenly rising, and gazing round her; "did I but dream!"

"Imprudent!" ejaculated Lady Melville; "have you then been sleeping in the open air?"

"What is this place?" resumed Laura eagerly, and with a look of wildness and terror: "where am I? Take me from it, I conjure you! What is this place?"

"You have too suddenly awakened from your unfortunate slumber," said Lady Melville, "and your head is confused."

"Did I dream it then?—Was it a vision?" demanded Laura: "yet take me hence—the place is altered—the sky is stormy, and the grass conceals a serpent!"

"My dear child, recollect yourself!" said her Ladyship in considerable alarm: "the horizon is rather overclouded, which induced me to seek you; but the serpent is a part of your dream!"

"I hope so," sighed Laura; "but I should be glad to go, for I am terrified and

and chilled!" and her teeth chattered audibly.

Lady Melville led her forward; and the motion restoring her bewildered senses, she reflected with anguish and horror upon those dark sentences that had fallen from the lips of St. Orme. They implied that she suffered under the stigma of calumnious reports, and that he had believed in their justice.—"They have also reached his sister and Mrs. Aubrey," thought she; "and still may I vainly write, since it is contempt that causes their silence."

When they arrived at the house, Lady Melville placed her near a fire, and procured her some wine and water, which she compelled her to drink: and the moment her hapless charge was sufficiently recovered, she ordered her carriage, and returned to town; where Laura was glad to seclude herself in her apartment, to meditate upon her situation, and the impressive charge of St. Orme.

But this was entirely incomprehensible, unless she could discover why the place in which he had found her, was so improper,

improper, that madness only on her part could have led her to it. Her inquietude and strange conjectures she was, however, obliged to endure, until the enquiries she at length instructed Dolly to make of the servants who had attended Lady Melville, could be answered; and she then learned that the house belonged to Lord Glendarvon.

"To Lord Glendarvon!" repeated Laura, in an agony.

"Yes, Ma'am," returned Mrs. Maunder: "and Harry says, his Lordship has got almost a matter of half a dozen such places, so he can well spare my Lady that; and he guesses that she is to get it for little or nothing—as her general way always is! So when I told him to take care as he wasn't heard, he swore he didn't care, not he; for he was downright tired of the skimping out-of-the-way doings as is here—for it was no credit, he said, to be sarvent in such a family!"

"I wish most earnestly," exclaimed Laura, "that you could contrive to convey a letter for me to———"

Dolly

Dolly waited not to hear the conclusion of the sentence, but burst into sudden invectives against the impertinence of keeping her prisoner in a free country, for the whims of an old woman who did not know what she would be at; and declared if it wasn't out of love and regard for her young Lady, she wouldn't stay to be sarved so.—"I was only just a-going this morning," continued she, "when her Ladyship was off the premises, you see, Ma'am, to get myself a bit of ribbon and a mouthful of fresh air; and truly Madam Fisher stops me short, and says to me that her *good* Lady never allowed the woman-sarvents in her house to be gadding about the streets, and Joe must fetch me what I wanted when he did his errands at twelve o'clock. Well, Ma'am, I was telling this piece of impurence to Harry, who is a civil, well-behaved young man, and he let me into the secret, that all the women in the house, from her Ladyship's own woman to the kitchen-wench, are tooked out of the Magdalen, that his Lady might have 'em at low wages

wages, and keep 'em under her thumb—so when one runs away, she goes and gets another. I assure you, Miss Laura, I don't like at all to sociate with such gentry; and so I told Harry—and he says, he could tell me such things as are sprising, in this way."

"Could you entrust this man with a letter?" asked Laura. "Would he oblige you so far, do you think, as to execute such a commission faithfully?"

"Lord, I'm sure he would!" returned she, "for he is in as great a passion at the doings, as I can be for the life of me—and I'm sartain he'll do it, if it's only out of spite!"

"Well then to-night," resumed Laura, "when I have an uninterrupted moment, I will write to Mrs. Hamilton; if she should be still out of town, I will direct that the letter be immediately forwarded to her: but I must depend upon Harry to take it to her house."

"Yes, Ma'am: then he shall go to-morrow morning early," said Dolly, "before her bustling Ladyship be stirring, or else

else she'll be asking where he's gone, and making a to-do! and it must be pretty early too; for they say she hardly ever sleeps more than an hour or two—I'm sure I never heard of such a woman in all my born days!"

"But, perhaps," returned Laura, "this action may be discovered, and occasion the poor man to lose his place; and that would give me infinite——"

"He don't care for his place, I promise you, Ma'am! if there's no better to be had, one comfort is, there can't well be worse—that they all agree in!"

With this assurance, Laura endeavoured to quiet her scruples: but the necessity there appeared for so clandestine a step was the only circumstance that could have urged her to take it, added to the reflection, that in any other household but that of Lady Melville, there could not have been occasion to employ any one but her own woman; and with any other person but her Ladyship, the motive for wishing so sudden and immediate a communication

munication could not, she believed, have existed.

The many intimations she had now received of art and duplicity in the Countess, and the idea so assuredly given to Dolly by her domestics, that she never acted in any respect without some proposed advantage to herself, induced her to suspect that, as Fanny Meedon had hinted, she meant to speculate upon the detested partiality of Lord Glendarvon; a suspicion this proposed transfer of the villa entirely justified, and which the alienation of her friends, it was in that case the wish of Lady Melville to accomplish still more, must encourage her to pursue.

"And to this I am the sacrifice!" exclaimed Laura. "Could she, at her age, be so *unthinking* as to have taken me to a place, which is certainly still in the possession of that hateful man, at the hazard of all that can be said from the malicious, and imagined by the world, from the character of Lord Glendarvon! Yes, I will write to implore the advice of Mrs. Hamilton; situated as I am, could I expect

more than advice! And even should this amiable woman offer me the protection of her roof, can I brave the indignation of Lady Melville by openly rejecting her patronage, and not assign some means of liquidating the debt I have most unhappily incurred: the expences attendant on my late malady must have been very considerable—and her care, her attention—how strange! And what method have I to discharge the pecuniary part of this obligation?—None! The Marquis of Bellingham thinks not of me—cares not what becomes of me; and Lord John, I too much fear, will never forgive my apparent inattention to his injunction, and opposition to his sentiments. But Mrs. Hamilton will perhaps intercede for me—I will at least conjure her, by the beloved memory of my regretted Mrs. Rothemere, not to abandon me!—Oh ever dear, ever lamented friend! from your lips I shall never more receive counsel and comfort—on your maternal bosom my aching head will never more rest in security and peace—in the mansion where alone I have ever

known happiness, you are no longer to be found, and your arms will never more open to receive your forlorn and wretched Laura!"

The tender recollections that now rushed to her mind, awakened the sensibility of her soul, and she wept bitterly; but experienced a relief from the effusion, which she much required.

CHAP. X.

THE depression Laura now felt was much less painful, though apparently more deep; and Lady Melville finding that her health had not suffered by the imprudent slumber she had so readily imagined, and which Laura could not contradict without betraying her secret, requested her in the evening to join her party.

At nine o'clock Lady Mary Mornay

was announced, who addressed Lady Melville with as much composure as if she had been entirely unconscious of any offensive neglect; and then turning to Laura with a very tender mien—

"My sweet friend, are you recovered?" enquired she. "You want a little *rouge* I perceive; but you may console yourself for that—for I declare you look more delightfully interesting than ever! I should not regret a fever now and then, if I could hope to appear so captivating after it."

Laura, who had transferred a part of her energetic dislike from the father to the daughter, irritated and disgusted at this folly, made little reply to it; and Lady Mary then enquired how she could possibly be so unreasonably ill-natured as to resent her not having called whilst she was ill.—"If I could have performed any service, I would have perfectly lived here," continued she; "but I am the most wretched nurse in the world, because I always faint away in a sick chamber: so I think my friends should be extremely obliged

obliged to me for not adding to the confusion and anxiety of one!"

In the height of this discussion, which Laura repeatedly protested was wholly unnecessary, Captain Biranly entered, whose compliment was received by Lady Melville with complacency; and whilst he congratulated the astonished Laura upon her convalescence, the party was further increased by Mr. Sandby and Mrs. Bergarde.

"Miss Delaunie, where the devil have you mislaid your bloom *à la Circassienne!*" said the sapient husband of Lady Madalina: "you look like a spectre, child! Faith, if you were to put round you a heap of furbelow veils, you would look picturesque enough!"

"Is not that the second son of old Lord Donarty?" asked Lady Mary in a low voice, and addressing the question to Laura, who might not perhaps have entirely comprehended to whom she alluded, had not her glass been directed more than once to Biranly; and Laura having observed this, and recollecting the

title, which she had formerly heard, satisfied the fair enquirer that she was right in her conjecture.

Lady Mary then commenced a sort of siege, which the natural gallantry of Captain Biranly induced him to attend to: and whilst Lady Melville was forcing two or three maternal questions upon the attention of her son-in-law, Mrs. Bergarde took a seat near Laura, and asked with a smiling air, if she entirely approved the *bijou* of a place she had seen in the morning. She felt the quickened circulation die her cheeks at this demand; and after a painful hesitation, replied that she had not possessed either strength or inclination to survey it.

"Indeed!" resumed Mrs. Bergarde. "It was not then curiosity that drew you thither?"

"I accompanied Lady Melville," returned Laura in a faltering accent, "without knowing whither her Ladyship was going, to a place I merely understood she meant to become the tenant of."

"Lord Glendarvon then lets it?" said Mrs.

Mrs. Bergarde. "For the summer months only, I imagine?"

"I really do not know," replied Laura; "I am quite ignorant of the plan Lady Melville has formed."

"I believe you, my dear Miss Delaunie," retorted Mrs. Bergarde with quickness; "other people are, however, more clear-sighted!"

Laura now regarding her with an anxious mien of enquiry, she resumed in a more disengaged tone—

"Have you seen Lady Ronald very lately?"

There was a meaning, Laura thought, in the eye of Mrs. Bergarde as she uttered this, that again suffused her cheek: and recurring likewise to the depravity so abhorrent to her heart, she replied in a very grave accent, that she had not.

"Not once since your malady?" was repeated by the interrogator.

"Not for a moment," said Laura in some alarm, and again fixing upon Mrs. Bergarde an eye of inquietude.

Lady Melville now occupied a seat near

them, and Mr. Sandby being then disengaged, once more addressed Laura: and with very little preliminary, enquired aloud with his usual thought, in what manner she had contrived to pass the time, when she was so suddenly left in solitude at Adwan.

A question so very inconsiderate, embarrassed her extremely; even the temper and forbearance of Lady Melville appeared discomposed by this unpardonable and careless revival of a shock which had nearly deprived her of her reason: and Mr. Sandby perceiving that he had made a *bévue* not to be very readily overcome, departed without urging a categorical answer.

The conversation then became more general; but Laura, absent and anxious, could not take any part in it, and was relieved when the moment arrived that she could retire for the night, and consider in what words she could best intimate her situation to Mrs. Hamilton, without aspersing, perhaps with too much severity, the designs of Lady Melville.

She

She knew that it was not uncommon for people of consideration to let or lend an extra habitation; nor could she hope that Lady Melville would forego a favourable opportunity of procuring such a *campagne* as she professed to want, because the person of whom she was to take it, was a man of gallantry—a circumstance that could not affect herself.

"And could I feel any astonishment," thought Laura, "were she *without* design, to deprive me of the estimation of the world, when all her precepts and all her influence have produced so unfortunate an effect upon her own offspring? But she is therefore, even without evil intentions, the less proper and desirable a protectress for me, young and inexperienced as I am! And the more I suffer from the result of her too officious patronage, the greater reason will Lord John believe he has to discard me from his favour!"

Laura had long apprehended that she was not justified in quitting the house of Mrs. Meedon so precipitately, however

mortified she might have been by the exhortations of this good lady, without applying to some of her father's family; and the more irretrievable the error was, and disastrous in its probable effects, the keener were her too late regrets.

Her letter to Mrs. Hamilton expressed this compunction, whilst it delineated the motives by which she had been urged to act otherwise. She reverted to the unfortunate accident which had retarded the injunction of Lord John, and the advice of Mr. Aubrey; this last had she sooner learned, would have impelled her, she wrote, to have hazarded the ignominy of being turned into the street by Mrs. Meedon, rather than have disregarded it.—"But," added Laura, "unless Lord John would have the patience to listen to my justification from the indulgent mouth of an advocate, I have entirely lost his friendship! Mr. Aubrey too, and his amiable Lady are prejudiced against me, I fear; and I have unwittingly offended Lady Betty Traherne—from her therefore I dare not presume to expect protection or good offices,

offices, and it is upon your benevolent interference in my favour, and that of Mr. Hamilton, that I must hope and rely. The place still retained in your memory by my lost friend, will perhaps plead for me to your generous heart. Oh, why does every passing day extort from my eye another selfish tear in addition to the many I have shed! Unhappy for me was the hour that gave her peace—but I am wrong to regret it!——Allow me, dear Madam, the satisfaction of hearing from you, if your absence from London, or any other circumstance should prevent me from the happiness of seeing you; and pardon me for taking the liberty of entreating that if you send to me a billet by your servant, should you, fortunately for me, be in town, he may deliver it immediately to Dolly, that I may not suffer from any carelessness or remissness of a household, where my conscious insignificance informs me I cannot reasonably exact much attention!"

The letter concluded with an enquiry and a remembrance to Mr. Rothemere;

and although she was far from being satisfied with the expression of her sentiments and wishes, yet the night was now so far spent, that from mere lassitude, she would not revise or alter it.

At six, Dolly stole softly to her apartment, to take it to the appointed emissary, whose ready concurrence she had reported in the past evening: and Laura awaited her return and favourable report with a very anxious heart. It was not long protracted; but Mrs. Maunder exclaimed, when she had carefully shut the door—

"Would you believe, Ma'am, that the old lady is up and about already; if I didn't meet her full butt, I'll be hanged!"

"Where then is my letter?" demanded Laura in a faltering voice.

"Oh Lord, I slipped by, and run and gave it to Harry, who was waiting," replied the *suivante*.

"And is he gone with it?" resumed Laura.

"I don't know, but I believe so," replied Mrs. Maunder: "for you must know,

know, Ma'am, we heard her Ladyship's voice as she was coming down stairs, so I run back again, that she might not see me talking to him: because none of the women sarvents here is allowed to speak a word to the men hardly, else Madam Fisher would be after them, for fear they should be at their old pranks! I'm sure one had as good live in a Papishes Nunnery! and I hope, Ma'am, Mrs. Hamilton, or some of 'em, will come and fetch you away, or else I believe I shall soon go crazed with the doings!"

She now closed the curtains, and recommending to her young Lady to take another nap, assured her Harry would take care of her letter, and give it Mrs. Hamilton himself, if she was in London; but the security of Dolly could not divest her of a fear that the uncommon activity of Lady Melville would be fatal to her wishes; and as she found it impossible to close her eyes from the effects of this anxiety, she arose soon after, and attended the early *déjeuné* of the Countess; as she feared Dolly might have been observed

observed in her journies to her apartment, which could not be accounted for, unless she appeared to have been giving the accustomed attendance.

Lady Melville considerably lessened her apprehensions by a more than usual kindness of language and manner, and did not even intimate the least surprise at her matinal appearance: yet when Laura repassed to her own dressing room, Mrs. Maunder informed her that Harry was not yet come back, which put her quite to a non-plush; but only luckily he had not been asked for by Madam Fisher, or Mr. Wilson, or any of 'em.

This intelligence again recalled her alarm; and whilst she suffered under its influence, she was compelled to attend the invitation of her patroness, who wished, she said, to make a few purchases, and pay some bills before she rusticated; and meant to enlarge her ride, because she hoped the air would be beneficial to her young charge.

Laura, who now involuntarily shrunk from the keen eye of Lady Melville, with a sensation

a sensation very much resembling guilt, followed her to the carriage, without having received any news of her messenger, though it was then past ten o'clock.

When they entered Bond Street, her Ladyship said she would not fatigue her by requiring her to quit the carriage, nor detain her half the morning at a shop-door, as her business would be soon expedited--an assertion she very shortly proved the truth of; for in an hour she announced that she had only to call at her upholsterer's, and would then drive a few miles out of town.

When Lady Melville again left her, Laura unconsciously gazing at the people as they passed, was struck by a figure resembling that of Fanny Meedon; and suddenly advancing her head to ascertain if her conjecture were right, the young woman raised her's, and Laura catching a glance of her face, which had been concealed by a large bonnet, discovered that it was indeed her friend.

Charmed with this unhoped-for *rencontre*, she motioned to the servant to open

open the door, and let down the step; and embracing Miss Meedon with an aspect of pleasure, replied to her enquiries, that her health was now entirely re-established.

"I first heard of your illness," said Fanny, "from the good woman with whom I informed you I meant to leave my letters. When she beheld the address of the first I had written, she told me that she had been a servant to your friend Mrs. Rothemere, and had nursed you in your infancy, and attended you in your early childhood."

"The first letter!" interrupted Laura eagerly: "you have then written others, and I have not," she added in a lower voice, "been fortunate enough to obtain them."

"Until the day before yesterday," resumed Miss Meedon, "I feared that you were not in a state to read or reply to them: but the report of Lady Mary Mornay then informing me that you were quite convalescent, I wrote again, and carried my letter; and my business abroad this morning, was to discover if you had yet sent

sent for any. I found you had not, and resumed it to add something, in the hope that it would still reach you."

"Ah, give it me!" exclaimed Laura, eagerly extending her hand, and placing the letter in her bosom; "you then are still my friend—you at least neither calumniate nor reproach me! Oh, I have much to say!"

"I fear," returned Miss Meedon, shaking her head——then interrupting herself—"The good woman," she resumed, "your old servant, Nancy Mitchell, has called almost every day at the door of Lady Melville, and was never permitted to see you."

"How cruel!" exclaimed Laura: "I remember her well—Mrs. Rothemere loved her.—Ah, here is Lady Melville!"

Poor Fanny now expecting some specimen of right honourable treatment, hastily quitted the carriage; whilst her Ladyship regarded her with suspicion and displeasure: and Miss Meedon, advised by the reserved air Laura involuntarily assumed, coolly bade her adieu.

"Who

"Who is that very strange-looking young woman?" demanded the Countess; and when she had received the reply to this enquiry—"I thought, Miss Delaunie," resumed she with a more haughty mien than Laura had ever yet seen her wear, "at least I understood from you, that the impertinence of those people had not left such an impression of gratitude upon your mind, as upon the first encounter of either of them, to invite them to a conference so very social as that which I unhappily interrupted."

Laura, who trembled at the glances cast upon her, found courage however, to say that Miss Meedon had ever conducted herself with great kindness to her, and had not appeared to concur in the wish of her mother to drive her from their roof.

"I perfectly comprehend the meaning of that sort of *manege*," returned Lady Melville: "when the mother has been too hasty and acrimonious, the daughter is employed to sooth and soften. And you, with a very small exertion of your discernment,

discernment, Laura, might have discovered it too, and spared all this display of philanthropy towards the girl, who, I am convinced, is very artful and undeserving—her countenance betrays her; and I could wish to learn what important affair induced the lady to walk forth thus unaccompanied; if she tramps the streets by choice, unattended in this manner, she cannot be a proper associate for her mother's inmates."

"Mrs. Meedon does not wish her," returned Laura, "to occupy the time of the servants, nor indeed does her daughter wish it; for your Ladyship must imagine they are very fully employed."

"Well, well," interrupted Lady Melville, "the subject is not worth a further discussion: yet suffer me to hint to you, my dear child, that this young woman is not a proper intimate for you."

Laura received this *hint* in silence; and her companion sunk a few moments after into a deep reverie; whilst her young charge, who earnestly wished to regain her liberty, thought the drive uncommonly

uncommonly tedious and stupid. Indeed it was considerably lengthened beyond the intention of her Ladyship; for she was so much occupied by her reflections, that she had forgotten to give the coachman the signal to turn back, and he had driven almost to Edgeware, ere the Countess recollected that he awaited it.

In Oxford Street, as Lady Melville, on their return, was giving some directions to her servants, a loud and discordant voice burst upon her, exclaiming—

"God bless the King, and upon my word now, here is my Lady her own dare self! here, you fellow, stand by, and let me spake a word to my Ladyship; for I'm come up to London to spake a word or two concerning my affairs, for they're all going to rack and the divil for want of a little bit of help, which my Ladyship promised to give me a matter of twenty years agone, when I squinched the fire at the hazard of scorching my brains out! And now, my Lady," added this vociferous personage, who drove a most flaming visage into the opened window,

window, and annoyed the ladies with a very powerful effluvia of brandy and tobacco, "and now's the time, d'ye sae, when they've the black-heartedness to ax me a matter of two tirteens for a quartern loaf, and another for a mutton-chop! Arrah, what's a body to do, left in this divilish manner to the discrition of the d—m—dest extortioners that ever stripped a poor soul of his hard-arned wages!"

Lady Melville now, for the third or fourth time, endeavoured to be heard; and the servant, scandalized at the crowd that was fast collecting, essayed to remove the complainant from the carriage side: but with an Herculean arm, Mr. Ballioch (for it was indeed himself) repulsed his efforts, and continued in a tone that rose in a proper climax with the injuries and wrongs he recited.

"I warked fore and aft for my little praperty, fair weather and foul, night and day; and when I'd got enough, d'ye sae, my Ladyship, to lay up my timbers, and lave a clear sea for the youngsters that come after me, the divils comes and claws my

my arnings into their own lockers—burn their iron fangs! Dat ever Pat Ballioch should live to be axed two tirteens for a loaf that he don't care to ate, and not git a drap of brandy to comfort me, widout being boddered and tould that I'm spinding my praperty, and won't lave enough to lay me in the hard arthe when I've broke my heart wid the thoughts on't!"

Those of the mob, who were sufficiently near to hear this lamentation, applauded it with shouts, and affirming testimony of its justice: and the servants of Lady Melville, provoked at the situation in which Mr. Ballioch had placed them, now united their efforts to drive him from his post; the lackey employing his cane, and the coachman his whip.

Laura was dreadfully terrified at the affray, which to her appeared very serious and formidable; and Lady Melville vainly exerted her lungs to quell it. Her reiterated and urgent commands to her servants to desist, could not be heard, and they were too busily employed to heed her gestures.

"Ho,

"Ho, is dis di way ye trate me!" exclaimed Mr. Ballioch, returning with his whole force the salutations he received: "will I be trated like a rascally tief and a pickpocket for spaking the trute! Arrah, ye shall hear more of it!"

At this moment a screaming voice pierced every ear, which lamented the hardship of the owner's destiny, and called out in eager tones to Pat Ballioch to be quiet, and behave himself like a Christian.

This remonstrance proceeded from his wife, who issued from a public-house on the opposite side of the way, where Pat and herself happened to have taken up their abode since they had journied to London: but her interference and exhortations were destined to be useless; for the crowd, incensed at the double attack so nobly sustained by Mr. Ballioch, drew him from the reach of the whip, and the combat then became more equal, and promised to be of a very amusing and satisfactory duration.

Lady Melville now in an indignant tone,

tone, desiring the coachman to drive home, he was compelled to obey, and leave his fellow-assailant to the mercy of his adversary and the champions who supported him.

In a few moments the attention of her Ladyship was impelled towards Laura, who appeared to be fainting; and the carriage was again stopped to procure water, after Lady Melville had vainly applied her salts, and chafed her temples.

Several people then surrounded them to offer assistance, and enquire into the occasion of the distress which was so evident: and as it was now considerably beyond the plebeian morning, people of distinguished rank began to dash, like gold-fish in a globe, about the prescribed limits of fashionable walking and riding; and amongst these was the Earl of Melville, who, disregarding the pale aspect of Laura, hastily demanded where the servants of his mother were.

"I cannot now inform you," she replied: "but I beg you will carry Laura into that shop."

"Thomas,"

"Thomas," said his Lordship, beckoning his groom forward, for he was as usual on horseback, "dismount, and take that young woman into a shop."

Before Thomas could execute this command however, a gentleman less dignified, hastily advanced, and performed the disdained office himself.

"What is the matter?" demanded a most vinegar-faced old woman, who was apparently purchasing some articles upon the counter before her.

"I believe, my Lady," replied the man who was serving, and did not dare to leave her, "that it is a carriage broke down."

"Is that all?" she resumed, again adjusting her spectacles: "humph!—hysterics I suppose!"

Lady Melville had not followed Laura into the shop, neither had any of the people who had quitted it to offer assistance, returned. A confusion and uproar, still superior to the former, appeared to rage in the street; and the gentleman who had supported Laura, now called for

attendance, in a very loud and indignant tone.

The old lady regarded his lifeless charge very earnestly through her spectacles; but did not move from her seat: the obsequious shopman, however, ran for some water, and called with equal vehemence for Molly and Betty: but Molly and Betty were both immoveably fixed to the window above, out of which they were hanging to view the scene in the street; and the gentleman cursing the inhuman apathy of all around him, carried Laura into a sort of parlour behind the shop, and supported her in a chair until the man brought the water.

The old lady now joined the group, still gazing upon the senseless object of her curiosity, without affording the least assistance to recover her; and perceiving by the aid of her spectacles, part of the address of Fanny Meedon's letter, which had almost slipped out of the bosom of the robe Laura wore, she drew it from its discovered retreat, and having read the super-

superscription, let it fall with a trembling hand, and suddenly quitted the place.

When Laura revived, Lady Melville and some women surrounded her; and in a few minutes she was led to the carriage, the door of which was opened by the footman, who carried upon his face and his attire several marks of the prowess of Mr. Ballioch.

Lady Melville appeared much agitated; and on reaching her own house, having given Dolly and Mrs. Fisher a charge to attend to Miss Delaunie, she retired to reflect, meditate, plan, and replan, until she could hit upon some machination to meet the emergency of the case.

CHAP. XI.

THE moment Laura could dismiss the officious *confidante* of Lady Melville, which only repeated assurances of an entire recovery could effect, she sought for her letter. The only pocket fashion allowed her to wear, was just of sufficient size to contain a small purse, yet Laura examined it in the utmost trepidation; she threw open her dress with a trembling hand, but, alas! her search was fruitless!

"There is assuredly a spell upon me!" she exclaimed: "must I again suffer by a loss, which, like the former, may be irreparable! Miss Meedon too, may be rendered still more miserable by this fatal accident! Am I then inevitably doomed to continual mischance!"

Dolly was on the point of enquiring of her

her young Lady what thus distressed her, when her utterance was impeded by a sound that suddenly recalled to her mind very unpleasant reflections; for the voice of her former master echoed up the staircase in all its native unchecked thunder, and reminded Mrs. Maunder of those rustic days, when in a coarse stuff gown and blue woollen apron, she was so obliging as to bring Mr. Ballioch's milk-pail home upon her head; and stand up to her knees in snow several days successively, to chop wood for the kitchen fire, round which they sat without any idea of fencing either with rug or carpet, against the chilling effect of a stone flooring: a remembrance that more particularly struck upon the conscience of poor Dolly, because in imitation of the laudable examples of the gentlewomen-*suivantes* she had lately associated with, she had only the evening before grumbled very audibly at being compelled to sit in a room with a floor-cloth, which petrified her delicate feet.

"Lord J——s!" exclaimed Dolly, "if

that mad devil an't come here on purpose to vex one! Who'd a thought of seeing of he in Lunnon—why what in the name of the fathers now, can he have to do in Lunnon!—Lord, he's as drunk as Chloe!" she resumed, after listening a few seconds: "well, if ever I see the like! Well, I'll just go and ask——But that puts me in mind—do you know, Ma'am, that Harry's turned away without a minute's warning!—There's some juggling work that I'm not at the bottom on, about that!"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Laura, forgetting for a moment the other grievance, and thinking only of the probable injury the man had sustained through her.

"This Lady Melville is a witch, as sure as I'm alive!" continued Dolly: "God forgive me, if I don't believe she has to do with the old one! I wondered and wondered Harry staid so long—and fumed and fretted to think of his being so foolish to stay out so all the morning; when behold, I met a porter coming down from the men's garret, with a box

on

on his shoulder: so with that I begins to suspect! And as sure as we're alive, they wouldn't even let him come into the doors for his things, but sent for his livery to the place where he went to lodge, till he can turn himself about—that the under-housemaid told me."

Laura would have sent him some pecuniary recompence for the misfortune of which she felt herself the occasion, but that she had no means of conveying it to him: and the uneasiness she endured from the circumstance, added to the state of insulation in which she plainly perceived it was the intention of Lady Melville to keep her, inspired her with courage to resolve upon applying to her without reserve, and representing that it was her earnest wish to entreat the protection and countenance of the family of the Marquis, lest they might take occasion to believe themselves insulted by her apparent neglect.

This determination once concluded upon, the mind of Laura became more calm; and she awaited with tolerable

composure the summons to dinner, which she believed would produce a *tête-à-tête* between herself and the Countess, who was now, she thought, in complete possession of every ineffectual effort she had used to elude her vigilance.

But the conversation she now equally wished and dreaded, did not take place at the time she supposed she might find an opportunity of introducing it; for the adventure of the morning had already been sufficiently canvassed to reach the ear of Lord Glendarvon; and had prompted him to make a personal enquiry at the door of Lady Melville, to whom he was immediately introduced, in pursuance of a positive general order given to her domestics.

After the lady had dissipated his apprehensions for her own welfare and safety, and those of her young guest, she proceeded to a detail of the circumstance that had occasioned the unlucky affray: yet in stating the claims of Mr. Patrick Ballioch, she laid very little emphasis upon his service to herself individually,

but

but rested his chief merit upon the extreme care his wife and himself had taken of the childhood of her beloved Laura Delaunie, which she feared had not been properly considered by the Marquis of Bellingham; and she concluded by observing that it was very natural they should apply to her for redress and assistance, because she had recommended the poor neglected babe to them: and she really believed their solicitude and tenderness had preserved the existence of Laura.—"I wish," added Lady Melville, "to procure this strange, but worthy man some little place or post—a sinecure if possible; but, alas! from certain unfortunate recent circumstances, my solicitations are now little attended to! I have not sufficient interest."

"All that I possess," interrupted her auditor, "shall be exerted to second the benign efforts of your Ladyship!—some trifle or other I think I may be assured of obtaining for this good creature, who is, I am convinced——"

A strange noise approaching the apart-

ment, interrupted this eulogy:—it was indeed the same sound that first announced to Dolly the unwished-for neighbourhood of her ancient master—and in a few seconds, to the extreme mortification of Lady Melville, Patrick reeled into the room, exclaiming—

"Where are you, my Lady?—hare they tell me I will not smoke my pipe, for because, my Lady, you will be poisoned wid the stinch—but the divil any stinch is there, my Ladyship, but a very good stinch! I'm a frae man, my Lady, and I'll go back to the Hiliphant and Castle; for there d'ye sae, I'm at home for my money dat I spind—and what is money to Pat Ballioch, if he's to be jawed, and told that he's a stinch! I'm no stinch, my Ladyship, but a British subject; and as good a one as ever crossed the Channel!"

"For Heaven's sake!" whispered Lady Melville to those of her people who had followed Mr. Ballioch, in the vain hope of checking his career, "for Heaven's sake,

sake, allow him to do as he pleases, and have what he wishes!"

"Tank you, my Lady," resumed he, catching a part of the sentence, "dat is all I ax for—and is'nt it raison now, and moderation!"

"Yes, certainly," she replied: "for the present, good Mr. Ballioch, excuse the little misunderstanding that has happened—to-morrow, early in the day, I will speak to you."

"Oh, I bear no grudge or ill-will, my Ladyship! I'm a peaceable man, and never bear malice nor unkindness at heart: and if paple niver bodders me, I niver bodder them; so good avening to you, my Lady, and tank you kindly!"

Lady Melville with some little difficulty as to fact, but none in her elocution, excused the evident situation of the boisterous intruder; and Lord Glendarvon having admitted with infinite complaisance, all she wished to urge on the subject, then enquired if the villa had the advantage of her approbation; or if her Ladyship would condescend to point out any

alteration or improvement that might have occurred to her, to render it a more pleasant or convenient habitation to herself.

Lady Melville uttered many encomiums on the place; and added that if the rent were not entirely beyond the limits she had prescribed to herself, she wished to take it without any delay, as the health of Laura required an immediate change of air.

To this hint Lord Glendarvon replied, that he would instruct his steward to meet any agent of her Ladyship upon the subject, and he was certain the result of the conference would not be disapproved by her. In the interim, he conjured her Ladyship to regard the place as her own; an entreaty she so far complied with, as to determine upon removing to it the next morning, for certain reasons that appeared to her very urgent.

The adjustment of this affair, and the promise of Lord Glendarvon to *interest* himself in the welfare of Mr. Ballioch, were so grateful to Lady Melville, that when

when her noble visitor lamented the lateness of the hour, which must exclude him, he feared, from seeing Miss Delaunie, the worthy Dowager forgot one of her best and most established rules, of never encouraging a late lounger, even of her own family, by giving him a dinner; and with a smiling countenance, enquired if his Lordship could accommodate himself to her modest fare, and take a seat at her table—an intimation received by him with even more pleasure than he chose to express, and answered by a very grateful and ready acquiescence.

With much alacrity, he instantly left the house to arrange his afternoon's toilet; and when Laura descended from her apartment, she found him quite *en famille* with Lady Melville, by whose previous discussions respecting dinner-guests, she was perfectly enabled to form a proper estimate of the extreme consideration in which Lord Glendarvon was held.

The attentions of this Nobleman became daily more irksome to her; both from the dislike his character and his

manners inspired, and that Laura found a secret sentiment in her heart that indisposed her from receiving, without pain and aversion, any indication of particular attachment from every man but one, whose severe eye and remonstrating voice had lately appeared to her the reverse of friendship or love.

Towards ten o'clock Lady Melville, spite of her complacency, began however to be extremely fatigued with the duration of his Lordship's visit; for his conversation, though very decently and properly addressed principally to herself, was merely composed of those detached nothings which an imagination and attention differently occupied, would only permit him to utter; and she was not displeased when several birds of passage, attracted by curiosity, or a less objectionable motive, called in, *en passant*, to learn if possible all the particulars of the morning affray, which had been already reported over the town with a variety of incidental embellishments.

Amongst these a very ancient lady, whose

whose person was adorned in a very ancient style, and who wore, according to the ancient costume, a quantity of stiff ill-set diamonds, was particularly inquisitive; and Lady Melville rather appeared to evade her enquiries.

Lady Mary Mornay, who was one of the flying party, rather too openly laughed at the *caducité* of this good lady's charms, and the peculiar mode she had taken to adorn them; and by addressing herself particularly to Laura, invited her to join in the *persiflage.*

"I cannot imagine," exclaimed Lady Mary, "what could induce her to step out of her glass case this evening; for the wind is rather uncivil: and if she loses that honey-comb net-work—what do the old toads call it?—Oh, her *buffante*—her beautiful figure thus *dépourvue*, would scandalize the world still more than your's or mine!"

Laura, who had several times regarded the object of this happy pleasantry with earnest attention, and something of a painful remembrance, now enquired her name,

name, which she did not happen to have heard announced; and when she learned that she was entitled Lady Avington, recollected without further effort, that this was the same personage she had once outraged when a child, at the house of Lady Bellingham, for some ill-natured speech in which her mother had been implicated.

Lady Avington likewise betrayed symptoms of an equally tenacious memory; and regarded Laura from time to time with an aspect so ireful, that Lady Mary perceived it, and spite of the whispered entreaties of the conscious culprit, persisted in her ill-concealed *moquerie.*

"The untamed spirits of that wild girl incommode you," said Lord Glendarvon, who discovered that Laura was distressed by her communications: "give me that seat, Mary, and remove to the next."

"I will oblige you, papa," she replied: "but remember it is a sacrifice—*il faut m'en dédommager!* A conversation with my sweet friend is not to be now obtained by poor me every hour, you know."

"I

"I allow the truth of the sacrifice," returned papa, "though not of a conversation: for you were the only speaker. Your lovely friend," added he in a lower tone, and addressing himself wholly to the person he thus apostrophized, "still retains, I fear, the effects of the terror she experienced this morning."

"Tell me, my dear Laura, I conjure you, how it was!" exclaimed Lady Mary eagerly: "did the madman drag you out of the carriage? I hear he is a rejected lover of your's!"

"Do not reply to such mere conjectures, my amiable Miss Delaunie," interposed Lord Glendarvon; "though I acknowledge the idea is well worthy credit."

"Oh, what a dulcet look you have this moment received from Lady Avington!" resumed the daughter: "you did not observe it, Laura; yet it was her *chef d'œuvre*, and she is vanishing, that she may not disgrace it by a less perfect effort!"

Lady Mary was in part however mistaken;

mistaken; for the contemptuous, indignant, enraged, and malicious glance she had received, was not unnoticed by the hapless object it was meant to annoy, and she shuddered at its baneful scope.

When Laura retired for the night, her *suivante*, who was quite intoxicated with the homage she had extorted from Mrs. Ballioch, her former mistress, informed her that Lady Melville had *housed* both husband and wife; for that Mr. Ballioch was so exasperated at the evil treatment he had received from her servants, and from that ill-tempered, proud man, the Earl, her son, who had begun the fight, Dolly added, all over again when all were peaceably inclined, that he swore he'd be revenged some way or other: so to hinder more mischief, Lady Melville made the coachman and footman ax pardon in the street, and sent a man home with Mr. and Mrs. Ballioch to her own house. "But, fegs!" concluded Mrs. Maunder with a grin of satisfaction, "I was mortal glad to hear that Lord Melville had

had his stiff back well banged for his meddling!"

The next morning, as Lady Melville and her anxious guest sat at breakfast, their immediate removal to the villa was announced to Laura, and she was desired by her Ladyship to give Mrs. Maunder instructions to arrange her packages without delay.

Prepared as she was for an unpleasant discussion with her patroness, Laura felt the faint colour on her cheek wholly forsake it at this intimation, and the cup she held fell from her hand.

"Are you indisposed?" demanded Lady Melville.

"I fear, Madam," said Laura—"I fear your Ladyship will think me presumptuous: yet the probable welfare of my whole life could alone urge me to hazard the imputation of ingratitude, by declining the continuance of the unlooked-for hospitality your benevolence has extended to me."

"You decline it!" repeated Lady Melville:

Melville: "may I enquire in favour of whom?"

"I have indeed but very few friends," returned Laura with a deep sigh; "but those few I the more earnestly wish therefore to secure to myself. Your Ladyship has informed me that the maintenance I once possessed, is no more; and though I thankfully availed myself of your momentary protection and bounty, can I consent to increase the obligation beyond what even my alienated situation would excuse? Though the law does not allow me any connexion or family tie that I can cling to, yet I think I ought to petition the relatives of Lord Bellingham for counsel and assistance;—until they refuse them, I must suppose, acknowledged as I have been, that they could scarcely deny me either."

"And may I further assume the liberty of asking," interrupted Lady Melville, with an aspect of deceitful calm, "to what branch of the Traherne family you mean to apply? The old humorist, Lord John, I believe, you know to be travelling

travelling in search of the strayed Marquis;—his cousin is Ambassador at the ——— Court, where also reside his Lady and their family; and the only nephew Lord Bellingham has, is yet a minor, and cannot afford you much good counsel, I presume. You would not include in your intended application, the families with whom your father is only distantly allied or connected; and I think I have enumerated all his immediate relatives excepting Lady Betty Traherne——but I have too much respect for the memory of your mother, to suffer you to sue to that inhuman woman, who was the fell cause of all her miseries, and plunged her into the ruin she ever deplored with bitter anguish and repentance! Your departed parent, Laura, acknowledged in me a protectress, a friend, and a benefactress; and her letters, which attest my assertion, I will require you to read before you attempt to reply to me. I will only at the present moment add, that I am combating your whimsical rejection of the friendship I still offer, for your sake, not

my

my own—I can pity your error, and forgive it! Observe," she resumed, after a momentary pause, and pointing to a morning print that lay upon the breakfast-table, "how liable a woman in my situation is to be misrepresented, vilified, and calumniated! If I read this paragraph with composure, it is because my eye and my mind are habituated to contemplate the extreme injustice and credulity of the world. I am not therefore much displeased with you, if your imagination and ideas have run into a wide-spreading channel, which may have ingulfed much stronger judgments—at least more ripened and experienced!"

She then put into the hand of Laura the paper; and pointing to the paragraph, desired her to read it whilst she sought for a few of her mother's letters.

Laura obeyed: and beheld the title and situation of Lady Melville very plainly characterized, and a long history of the adventure of the preceding day, which was so strangely represented, and the *busy Dowager*, so she was denominated, so very grossly

grossly libelled, that Laura was shocked and confounded at the ignorance, falsehood, and insolence of the inserter; and could not avoid a secret acknowledgment of the magnanimity displayed by the outraged person, who now returned, and delivered to her the letters written by Mrs. Stanmore in the effervescence of her gratitude for the interference of Lady Melville, which had snatched her from despair —for the uncommon generosity she displayed, for her benevolence and tenderness, and the soothing honour of her avowed protection!

"This is the writing of Mrs. Rothemere!" exclaimed Laura, regarding the superscriptions with trembling eagerness.

"It is so," said Lady Melville, with an impressive accent.

At this reply, Laura was seized with an emotion that prevented her further utterance; and with fixed eyes, the letters still in her shaking hands, she awaited some explanation of this enigma. Lady Melville then proceeded—

"You are enabled to estimate the weight

weight that should be attached to the opinion of Mrs. Rothemere; for the excellent intellects you possess, she cultivated with assiduity and success; and in this opportune instance," pointing to the paper that contained the remarked paragraph, "you may perceive by what authority and upon what foundation the world too often judges! 'At this present period I am unfortunate, and mankind contemn me: when I appeared surrounded by the choicest blessings that Nature or Fortune could bestow upon a fond and anxious mother, I possessed the vain plaudits of the still vainer multitude, and received from their eager incense, all the enthusiastic encomiums which the most perfect character could scarcely merit. So much for the estimation of the world!"

"Did you not say," exclaimed Laura, "that these letters were from Mrs. Stanmore, my mother?"

"I did, my dear Laura: I loved your mother, and knew her well; you loved her, my sweet girl, but as a mother you knew

knew her not! When she married Mr. Rothemere——"

"Oh my senseless heart! She was my mother then! Mrs. Rothemere! friend! mother! shall I never see you more! Ah why did you ever veil the parent from my sight!—why leave me without once acknowledging your wretched Laura!"

"Recollect yourself, my child," interrupted Lady Melville, "and do not suffer yourself to question the motives of one you knew to be so wise and good! The tender affection I ever retained for her, spite of the barbarous prejudices of that society she was born to adorn, is extended to you: nor could I behold you casting yourself into that abyss that overwhelmed her, without retaining your rejecting hand. Lady Betty Traherne might perhaps receive you; but because the den of a ruthless hyena is open to you, am I coolly to regard the daughter of my lost friend approaching it, and not endeavour to draw her back! In one of these letters, mark what your hapless mother writes: if my memory betray me not, she says that

she ever cherished virtue, and but for the intolerable cruelties of one who bore the specious names of patroness and benefactress, she had never sunk into vice. I see you are much affected—I believe your opinions waver; but I leave them to the powerful influence of truth, and will not urge the balance. Yet, Laura—my beloved, mistaken girl, I must again intimate to you that we leave town this day; your health and mine require it, and your scruples are not of sufficient force to retain me. The house to which we remove, is now mine, and my guest you will continue therefore. Strange indeed must be the prejudice that affixes to any habitation, which passes from possessor to possessor ten times perhaps in the course of one moderate life, any peculiar contamination: if so, the fair character of every sojourner must accompany the title-deeds; and in a short time, I fear, this great metropolis would be a desert!"

Laura, astonished and confused at the unexpected intelligence she had received, every argument, every plea, every recol-

lection completely annihilated, remained silent; her busy imagination wholly centered in the papers she clasped to her bosom, and in the newly discovered affinity of her who had traced the characters they bore.

"I now leave you," resumed Lady Melville, "to read those memorials of the sentiments of your mother; and I expect, Laura, that when you have read them, you will decide upon the probability that she should thus think and thus write, of one who was unworthy of her esteem."

She then withdrew; and Laura, with a palpitating heart and a humid eye, unfolded the first paper, and beheld a sentence, importing that Lady Melville had preserved the reason and the existence of her parent.—"If my sanity or my lengthened days," continued Mrs. Stanmore, "are a benefit to my little cherub, my hapless Laura, it is to your Ladyship she solely owes it—you have snatched me from madness or death! my child will perhaps one day learn to appreciate the generous and noble benefactress of herself

and of her mother: but my gratitude, energetic as it is, still reverts with tears of admiration and thankfulness to the magnanimous and tender indulgence of a being so exalted and so virtuous, to one so humiliated and abject: and the liberality your Ladyship has displayed in those arrangements you have condescendingly thought proper to dictate, yields in my estimation to the gentle and soothing consolation that heals my wounded heart!"

CHAP. XII.

IN about two hours Lady Melville returned to Laura, and found her in a meditation so profound, that she did not immediately perceive her entrance. At length she started.

"I have been," she exclaimed, "very ungrateful and unjust! I have been misled by

by ideas which *I* ought not to have conceived, and at your feet I implore the forgiveness I blush to have required!"

"Enough!" returned Lady Melville, raising and embracing her; "I well know the sources of your error; but I will not sully our reconciliation by one reproach ——How can I indeed talk of reproach when that faded cheek and wan aspect fill me with alarm! Come, my dear Laura, as your prejudices have vanished, we will now quit this great town, where every passing hour brings with it new disgust, and establish ourselves in our rural dwelling, where I hope peace will attend our steps. My own health likewise too much requires it."

"Oh Madam!" interrupted Laura, "this alone——I would——"

"How is this!" exclaimed Lady Melville: "do you not tell me——"

"I avow my past errors," returned Laura, "and I contemn them; but that place——Ah, *I* shall never know peace if I return thither! Leave me here, I conjure your Ladyship—shut me in a garret—

give me only bread for food, and I will be submissive and contented—but do not take me to that place!"

"You are influenced by that unhappy dream and your weakened nerves," said Lady Melville, "to nourish this simple and unfounded aversion; but when your mind regains its proper vigour, you will reject this folly, and wonder that you could be so enfeebled as to admit it."

"My nerves, I believe, are weakened," returned Laura; "and at present my head is so confused, that I cannot urge those reasons I merely remember to have conceived against that residence; but if your Ladyship——"

"You offend me, Laura," said Lady Melville gravely; "either reject the testimony of Mrs. Rothemere entirely, or averring that you admit it, rely upon my friendship and upon my judgment, which is perhaps more enlarged than your's.—Come, the carriage has been waiting some time; for I did not expect when I ordered it early this morning, to have been drawn into such a serious discussion. Your

woman

woman can put up a few necessaries for the present, and the rest of your wardrobe may be sent with mine."

Laura would have immediately yielded to these hints, but that the voice of St. Orme, in its most energetic tone, still vibrated in her ear; and the exclamation—"What madness brings you to this place!" resounded to her recollection.

Lady Melville, however, with an alternate air of authority and tenderness, overruled every reluctant plea and objection she still, disordered as was the situation of her mind, endeavoured to urge: and having summoned Mrs. Maunder to give her the necessary directions, and require her to place in the carriage a change of raiment for immediate use, Lady Melville took the hand of Laura, and led her to it. Yet at the door she again hung back with renewed and more potent apprehension.

"Should I not at least," said she, "intimate to the Traherne family and to Mrs. Hamilton, with whom my mother was so nearly allied, that I am leaving

London; and inform them whither your Ladyship conducts me?"

"We shall revisit town in a day or two," replied Lady Melville; "until I quit it finally, I shall not announce my absence to my own friends—it would be premature and ridiculous! I shall be so much here, that I shall still consider that I occupy this residence, whilst the other will be merely an occasional one. When you take a morning ride into town with me, we will call at Mrs. Hamilton's door."

Laura, still entirely unconvinced, and averse to inhabit the house that had so very recently belonged to Lord Glendarvon, was compelled to submit; but when the spot met her eye, where she had in her former excursion first seen St. Orme, she burst into an agony of tears, and unconsciously exclaimed—"I am undone!"

Lady Melville reproved her emotion with some severity; and Laura, ashamed of having betrayed it, endeavoured to be composed during the remainder of the ride: yet, spite of her exertions, when the

the carriage turned into the lane described by St. Orme, her anguish was visible, and she sobbed audibly.

Her companion looked very grave, but forbore making any further comment until they arrived at the house; and she then desired her hapless young companion to recollect herself, and not force the people about them to conjecture that she was herself a harsh tyrant, and Laura a most ill-treated being. But this remonstrance was unheard; for her tears redoubled when she was compelled to quit the carriage: and Lady Melville conducting her hastily to an apartment, lectured her with some acrimony for her childish perverseness.

To Laura the whole day was gloomy and wretched; and at night her slumbers were disturbed by the image of the indignant St. Orme, which haunted her with menaces and reproach.

Dolly, who had reached the place in the evening, with some of the domestics of Lady Melville, was not displeased with the change of her abode; for she was completely fatigued with the honour of

having another person appointed to execute all her little commissions, as well as those of her Lady—a circumstance she privately imputed to the partiality of Lady Melville to her own people; because Dolly was no longer such a novice as not to be well aware of the laudable, established, and allowed perquisites of *Lunnon sarvents*, who never take the trouble of buying a few yards of ribbon, or of bringing in a trifling bill, without being *remembered* for such generous exertions. But as Dolly had now the liberty of walking about the grounds, when Lady Melville and her society might happen to be engaged in the house, she hoped to be able to extend her peregrinations occasionally to the villages round her, and again become commissioner in chief to her young Lady.

This intention, however, was entirely a private one, for Mrs. Maunder would not without great provocation, have willingly and openly excited the displeasure of Lady Melville, under whose dominion she perceived Laura wholly to be; because she had been rather appalled by the sudden

mandate

mandate her friend Mr. Harry had received, and now understood that this was the general method of the old Countess, to intimate her disapprobation of any particular domestic.

Perceiving by the countenance of discomposure Laura wore in the morning, that she had passed a restless night, Dolly good-naturedly undertook to console her with some news which she judged to be of a pleasing nature.

"Come, Ma'am," said she, "now don't ye be so dull! Lauk, you won't be so badly off here, I promise you: for as I was in the hall yesterday, looking after some of your things and my own, as was putting into the cart with other matters to be brought here, who should come to the door but Captain Biranly; and when he axed for her Ladyship and you, Mr. Wilson told him his Lady was at this place, and so was you: and says he—'My Lady desired me to say that her Ladyship would be right glad to see him;'—or something, Ma'am, tantamount to that—'if he rode that way.' And then

up drives Mrs. Bergarde's cotch, and he gives the same message. And then a little while afterwards comes the queerest old figure I ever seed in my born days—but she was a lady!—every thing about her all so anshunt like, and so out of the way, that I staid at the hall-window, and peeped at her out of curiosity till she went away. She axed about you, Ma'am, and when you went into the country, and when you comed back; but she looked so cross all the time, and so proud, that I think you had a good miss of her company, let her be who she will! Howsoever, I was going to say, Ma'am, I do suppose a good many of 'em will come here a visiting, and you won't have time to be dull."

Laura, far from being consoled by this information, was grieved at it; as she was now assured that the immediate intelligence of her change of habitation was thus disseminated, and she feared St. Orme might already have learned it. This anxiety, and the discovery of the preceding day wholly occupied her thoughts; and she scarcely remarked the account given her

her by Dolly, of the *anshunt* lady who had been so minute in her enquiries.

Yet still, authorized as she was by the sentiments the letters of her mother displayed of the character of Lady Melville, and impressed as was her imagination by the invidious and unjust *tournure* given to the public eye of their late adventure, she was assailed by doubts, now that the effervescence of her mind was cooled, as to the real views and designs of her patroness, whose actions, professions, manners, and aspect were at times contradictory and suspicious.

After breakfast, at which Laura had vainly endeavoured to appear serene and composed, her uncontroulable inquietude was increased by the presence of Lord Glendarvon, who called, *en passant*, he said, to receive the commands of Lady Melville: yet with this preluding intimation, he remained more than three hours; and having informed the Countess that he *believed* there was a light garden chair somewhere about the premises, and a galloway to draw it, which would convey herself

herself and Miss Delaunie round the grounds without fatigue and any unpleasant exertion, he accompanied them on horseback in their tour, which Laura was not permitted to decline. To her therefore, the beauties that met her eye, were not only tasteless, but viewed with disgust; and after a tedious drive, in which she received several hints from Lady Melville that her taciturnity and abstraction were not approved by her, she was at length released from the irksome attention she could not avoid, by their return to the house, and the departure of his discreet Lordship, who discerned that his society was no longer expected by the Countess on that day.

It was then almost the dinner hour of Lady Melville, and she hastened the repast, that she might obtain sufficient time after it, to make some necessary arrangements in her new household, which required much attention; her domestic plans having been rather discomposed by the interlopation of three or four people in the house and premises, whose services she

she was compelled to accept, in compliment to Lord Glendarvon: but the extreme *liberality* of his Lordship reconciled her to an inconvenience which she promised herself should not be a very lasting one; for as she could not eject these unwished-for dependants without a pretext which their own conduct must give her, she was resolved to attend to them so strictly, with the aid of her emissaries, that the pretext should not be long wanted.

Whilst her Ladyship was thus occupied, Laura again read the letters of Mrs. Rothemere, which she had not been required to return; and again her sentiments and her judgment fluctuated in favour of the Countess: but the reflections of the succeeding hour, in which the concurring opinions of every one with whom she had conversed, forcibly assailed her, and the encouragement given to the advances of Lord Glendarvon, when Lady Melville must perceive they were unwelcome and disgustful to her *protégée*, once more turned the balance, and she continued anxious and miserable.

In

In the course of the following morning, Lady Melville received letters which appeared to interest her considerably; and whilst she shut herself up to reply to them, she advised Laura to take the benefit of the fine weather, and walk; but particularly cautioned her to beware of yielding to an inclination which lassitude might give her, of slumbering in the open air.

On hearing this charge, Laura blushed and trembled; but having promised to attend to it, she left the house, and passed into the same walk she had chosen when St. Orme had appeared before her: every object was painful to her that more potently awakened the recollection at which her heart throbbed; yet she involuntarily sought to renew it, and having attained the seat so well remembered, gazed round her in alarm and expectation; but no sound of approaching steps, or voice of remonstrance struck her attentive ear—no pausing figure met her glancing eye; and almost disappointed, she passed on.

At the extremity of this walk, as Lady Melville

Melville had said, the Thames rolled its meandering waves; and it was separated from a neighbouring field only by a paling, concealed behind the tall shrubs that shaded the enclosure alike from the mid-day sun, and the bleakness of a north-east wind.

Laura having passed the fatal spot, now proceeded with her eyes fixed on the ground, until she reached the extent of the avenue, without being conscious of the length of the way; and scarcely casting one glance at the surrounding beauties that opened to her view, she mechanically turned back, and retraced her pensive steps. But having walked nearly half a mile in her return, her attention was attracted by a folded letter that lay immediately in the path before her; she stopped, and her own name appearing upon it, she caught it up in great perturbation, and was breaking the seal, when her attention was arrested by the following inscription, written with a pencil, in a very small hand, unlike that of the address:—

"You

"You dropped this letter in Bond Street during your insensibility on Monday morning. The person who preserved it for you, is inexpressibly concerned to be compelled to send it you in your present residence? Have you not been cautioned against the extreme impropriety of it? Had you remained but a few days longer in a less exceptionable dwelling, you would at this moment have been in the protection of a woman of unblemished fame, and under a roof that would not have tarnished your's!"

Having read this with an emotion not to be described, Laura gazed round her in an involuntary search for the writer; but no one was visible: and in an agitation that banished reflection and presence of mind, she fled in indefinable terror, until she beheld a part of that mansion she

she sought as a security, whilst she abhorred and dreaded it as the tomb of her happiness.

Trembling, and scarcely able to reach her apartment, she now again read the superscription; and almost in despair, broke the seal of the letter, without the most remote hope of finding consolation from the contents; for her mind was in a state to reject, in this view, even the voice of friendship, which she believed to be inadequate to dissipate or sooth her anguish.

"I have heard with great concern, my dear Miss Delaunie," wrote Fanny Meedon, "that you have been extremely indisposed: but from the same source of intelligence, Lady Mary Mornay, I learn also that you are now recovering; need I assure you that I am delighted at your convalescence? I have much to inform you of; but I fear if I am too communicative, my zeal and wish to serve you, may

may retard your recovery by affecting your weakened nerves. Oh how severely I regret that the complaisance of my mother to the inclinations of the most capricious and insolent——but I must restrain my indignation——I regret most earnestly that, joined to the precipitation of Lady Melville, it should have cast you into the power of her Ladyship. My dear Miss Delaunie, she is even worse than I represented her to you; and when I inform you that she is much suspected of having embezzled a great part of your fortune, you will no longer, I think, much estimate her present affectation of patronage! To your mother, who was, I hear, a most excellent woman, the Countess was the most insidious of foes, under the specious pretext and mask of benevolence and friendship; and it was only a course of years that unveiled the cruel deceit. I fear, unless you have sufficient resolution to shake off her protection, and seek that of others, she will extend the injury to yourself!

"You will be surprised at the positive air

air of these assertions, until I inform you that Mrs. Forster, the good woman with whom I vainly deposited my former letter, surprised and affected on reading the address it bore, informed me that she had been your nurse, and a confidential servant of your mother, whose memory she idolizes. Her name, she tells me, was Nancy Mitchell, and she thinks you may still remember her. Mrs. Forster has every day repeatedly and vainly applied to see you; and irritated at the refusal of Lady Melville to admit her, and fearing too for your welfare, if you remain under her guidance, in the height of her displeasure and distress, communicated to me, that I may repeat them to you, several circumstances that occurred within her knowledge, of the ill-concealed enmity and cruelty of this wicked woman. But I dare not trust them to paper: I can only say that her relation has been almost wholly confirmed by Mrs. Hamilton, upon whom I ventured to call early in this week, to inform her of your illness, and the self-imposed guardianship of Lady Melville,

Melville, upon the unfortunate occasion of your leaving the house of my mother.

"If this officious interference in your affairs should appear to you impertinent, forgive it, I entreat, my dear Miss Delaunie, in favour of my motive, which was that esteem and interest you have inspired me with.

"Mrs. Hamilton told me that she had already sent to you, and even called at the door of Lady Melville, having learned your removal by your woman, whom you had apparently commissioned to inform her of it; but she could not obtain any communication with you either personally or by letter; the answer to her applications having invariably been, that you were too ill to converse or write.

"Strange and suspicious as this conduct of Lady Melville may appear, I fear I have developed the meaning of it from the insinuations of Lady Mary Mornay, who is now reconciled to the Embletons; and having been rallied by several people on the superior beauty and youth of her future mother in-law, for thus you are designed

designed by this ill-tempered party, and having likewise received hints that the influence and management of Lady Melville may injure her prospects, by obtaining for you, with the establishment of a Peeress, very large settlements, she is now, as she says, cured of her silly attachment, and takes pleasure in complaining of the artifices by which she pretends to have been deceived. Her discussions, however, upon those by which Lady Melville endeavours to confirm and increase the passion of her father, and the report that you are to be taken to one of his houses, so much shocked and alarmed me, that I repeated the whole I had been enabled to gather from the conversation of our dissipated inmates, with my own resulting conjectures, to Mrs. Hamilton, who says she will take immediate measures to rescue you from the usurped power of the Countess, who secludes you from those by whom you might be informed of her views, and guarded against them, in the hope that your immediate marriage with Lord Glendarvon, if she can accomplish

accomplish it, will enable her to evade every enquiry into the embezzlement of the fortune settled upon you by the Marquis of Bellingham, which your amiable friend herself informed me——

"I am interrupted:—but I will now conclude my letter, and carry it early to-morrow morning to Mrs. Forster, lest I should not find another opportunity of doing either.

"As the contents are too important to be entrusted to any one but yourself, I wish to tell her not to deliver it even to a person you might think yourself justified in admitting to a knowledge of the confidence with which you honour me; for you must be sensible, my dear Miss Delaunie, that the freedom I have been tempted to use with the character of Lady Melville, would subject my family perhaps, as well as myself, to her unqualified resentment, should it ever reach her. I have therefore written another letter, much more guarded, which Mrs. Forster will give to a messenger, retaining this until you call yourself."

"I

"I hope to hear from you soon——I am again sent for——Adieu!—allow me to say I am, with much esteem,

"Very affectionately your's,

"F. M."

Laura read this letter several times ere her confusion, and the previous disturbance of her mind, would suffer her in any degree to combine and comprehend the contents.

"A marriage with Lord Glendarvon!" exclaimed she; "never, never! But Mrs. Hamilton will rescue me! A foe to my mother—an insidious foe!—hardened, unfeeling woman! to make the ardour of her misplaced gratitude the snare to ruin her hapless child! But I shall quit this place—Mrs. Hamilton will exert herself in my behalf. Ah Heaven, no! I am lost——Can I forget those words—'if I had remained a few hours longer,' (but a few hours), 'in a less exceptionabe residence,' I should then have been in the protection of a woman of unblemished

fame, and under a roof that would not have tarnished mine!' My fame is then tarnished—I am abandoned by every one —the scorn of all, and Lady Melville may now accomplish her cruel projects! But she shall not compel me to listen to the detestable Lord Glendarvon, or ever see him more! I will take refuge in the meanest hovel, and die under a roof that will not dishonour me, though it should expose my distracted head to the inclement skies!"

The agony of Laura was now fortunately relieved by tears, which calmed the tumultuous disorder of her spirits; and she then reconsidered her situation with more reflection and less passion: yet so terrible was the idea of remaining in the house of Lord Glendarvon—with the proprietorship at least so equivocal—and so dreadful the expectation of meeting Lady Melville, after the intelligence of Miss Meedon, which the corroborating assertion of Mrs. Hamilton, the secret uncontroulable bias of her own thoughts, and the testimony of facts rendered indu-

bitable, that she would have pursued the hasty plan of leaving the place, and flying to town, had a single being, however abject in rank and situation, but offered her an assisting hand: but the delicate timidity that almost ever accompanies a very young woman, who has never been a moment from under the influence and protection of friends or parents, restrained her from taking so decisive a step: and though the abode of her treacherous patroness was a loathsome prison, the world that encompassed it was, in her imagination, an unfathomable ocean, into which the extremest desperation could alone induce her to plunge without support or guide.

"Ah, who," thought Laura, "who could have placed that letter in my path but St. Orme! The writing, indeed, is not his—but the intimation tells me it cannot be any other! Yes, his voice can caution and reproach me; but he would think it too condescending to counsel or assist my inexperience!—or can he despise me so much as to suppose that I am a willing

willing agent in the hateful plans of Lady Melville, which are, it seems, so much discussed! Does he imagine I am so eager to court the chance of a wretched establishment and a sounding title, for which I must sacrifice alike my probity and my happiness! Cruel Cecil! I abhor the idea, and I could almost hate you for imputing it to me! How can I undeceive him?—only by flying. Fanny Meedon, too, insinuates that I should leave Lady Melville; but she tells me not whither I must bend my unfriended steps!"

END OF VOL. III.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

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